

Personnel and Administrative Sub-Committee Meeting at 08:00 on Tuesday 28 January 2025 held online via Teams

Present: G Christy Chairman
A Woollard
K French
J French
S Lemmon Town Clerk

No apologies were received.

The Committee confirmed the following points;

- a) The March Town Council Risk Assessment (circulated to P&A Committee members on 23.1.25) had been reviewed and adequately covered all areas of concern. The Clerk had made some minor amendments to reflect enhanced procedures, and these were accepted by the Sub-Committee.
- b) In particular, it was confirmed that;
 1. All assets listed within the March Town Council Asset Register had been inspected with the exception of the Notice Board which has not yet been installed. The Clerk had emailed Matt Wright and Phil Hughes on 8.1.25 for an update. Mr Hughes advised the Clerk on 24.1.25 that the notice board was still at The Base, and had been refurbished. We were under the impression that FDC was to provide a *replacement* board as part of the regeneration project. However, Cllr J French will inspect the refurbished board; if not satisfied with its condition, a replacement will be requested.
 2. In general, the levels of insurance cover were deemed to be sufficient. The additional Christmas Lighting (valued at over £100,000) had been added for the remainder of the year (one quarter) at a cost of £260.13.
 3. Because of the discounts available, another five years contract with Zurich Municipal had been implemented in 2021 and so we shall remain with Zurich until at least 2026 renewal.
 4. The financial internal control procedures had been reviewed and considered adequate. The Financial Regulations had last been updated and adopted by MTC on 5 August 2024 based on the new model regulations issued by NALC in July 2024.

In response to Cllr Christy, the Clerk advised that all policies were regularly reviewed, usually annually. In the event that new model regulations were published, our own regulations would as soon as practically possible thereafter be amended. The Clerk receives regular notifications from SLCC, NALC and CAPALAC and is notified of any legislative changes or proposals that would require a review of our policies or procedures.

5. The physical security arrangements for the buildings, contents and other items had been reviewed and considered adequate.

The new main doors had not been replaced as hoped pursuant to the grant of planning permission in Autumn 2022 due to the March Civic Trust's inability to secure grant funding.

Discussions with Historic England are ongoing and all potential sources of funding are being explored for essential repair and maintenance work to the Town Hall.

Officers are in regular dialogue with other tenants/users of the building to discuss security issues/breaches.

Cllr J French advised that the door needed to be replaced; if grant funding could not be secured, could the Civic Trusts reserves be utilised to fund this? In terms of the Civic Trust, councillors enquired who receives the money from Skoulding Suite bookings. The Clerk confirmed that since the responsibility for bookings was handed over to 20Twenty, 20Twenty retained the monies - effectively as an administration fee. Councillors felt that booking fees should be paid to the Trust instead, to be used for vital maintenance work.

Councillors felt that, notwithstanding the terms and the spirit of the Trust, the rents were far too low. The Clerk confirmed that regular rent reviews would now take place, and rents would be reviewed again in April.

Cllr Woollard advised that he would be willing to become a Trustee.

Cllr J French requested that Cllr Christy attend the next meeting of the Civic Trust [the Clerk will formally request this] and look at potential grant-funding streams.

Cllr Christy who had attended the January meeting of the March Civic Trust noted that many of the agreements were very 'informal'. For example, there is no signed agreement with March Town Council.

March Town Council had entered an informal arrangement at the time of the Town Hall's purchase. (By way of background, when the Town Hall was marketed by CCC, March Town Council was keen to purchase the building, but it was feared that if there was to be a local government restructure (such as that of 1974), the building could be clawed away. As such, it was purchased by a local businessman on the basis that it was put into a charitable trust for the benefit of the town and people of March.

It was then agreed that, in return for a nominal rent and use of the Skoulding Suite for its meetings, March Town Council pay items such as rates, insurance, cleaning, refuse collection and secretarial assistance on behalf of the Trust).

It was commented that the Skoulding Suite was not kept clean and often there were not enough tables or chairs out for Town Council meetings on a Monday evening.

March Town Council would be taking a hard stance in relation to the Trust going forward and it was agreed that the Clerk, along with Cllrs Christy and Woollard, would meet as soon as possible after 8 February and agree an action plan to take to the April meeting of the Civic Trust.

6. Following the break-in in 2023, the safe has been serviced and fixed. Window bars have been installed in more vulnerable areas to protect the Town Councils offices. The opportunity to install a CCTV camera linked directly to the Control Tower in Peterborough was discussed at the January main meeting. The options were very expensive, however. It was decided that the existing internal CCTV and the CCTV covering the Market Place was adequate to protect the council's offices. No cash is stored on the premises and there is signage to this effect displayed throughout the building.
7. The Council is observing all legal requirements.
8. Encrypted computer back-up data-sticks are taken home by the Clerk each evening. Manual and automatic back-ups are performed regularly. The Clerk has a lap-top computer for home-working. This is stored securely when not in use and is insured.
9. The Christmas Lights are erected and dismantled each year using paid helpers with Balfour Beatty providing electrical supervision. Any payments made from Council funds are agreed by the Christmas Lights Sub-Committee. The Clerk last reviewed the Method Statement and Risk Assessments in March 2024. These are issued to the team who erect the lights each year to agree and sign.

Other recommendations/points to note;

- a) A new Assistant Clerk, Mrs Susanah Farmer, was appointed on 8 January 2025 and commenced work on 27 January 2025 to replace Sally who is retiring at the end of the financial year. This will allow for a hand-over period of roughly 2 months.
- b) The Clerk had updated the Assistant Clerk's contract to reflect the most current legislation, regulations and employment practice.
- c) The Clerk had also drafted a Sickness and Absence Policy which was circulated to members of the P&A committee on 15.1.25 for consideration. The Policy is in line with good practice shared by the Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) and compliance with the Equality Act 2010. The Policy was

agreed by members of this committee and, as such, Cllr Christy will report this to full council on 3 February to formally adopt the Policy.

- d) That the Town Clerk's and Assistant Town Clerk's wages be automatically increased in line with future National Salary Awards for Local Council Clerks as agreed by The National Joint Council (NJC) for Local Government Services. In November 2024, the Clerk and Assistant Clerk received the NALC approved increase (with back pay to April 2024).
- e) That the Assistant Town Clerk's days and hours continue as at present.
- f) The Clerk is still working considerably longer than her contracted hours. The nature of the job is often chaotic and unpredictable. The workload has increased considerably as the role has evolved. The Clerk must be in a position to regularise her hours and take annual leave. A payment in lieu of untaken leave would be requested in March 2025.
- g) Our new cleaner has returned to work following her absence due to a broken collar bone and latterly flu. We are very pleased with her performance.
- h) It is now compulsory for employers to enrol employees in a company pension scheme if the employee is of pensionable age. The Clerk is enrolled in the pension scheme although the outgoing Assistant Clerk has an arrangement similar to Clive and is entitled to half a month's salary per year employed in lieu of a pension. The new Assistant Clerk has joined the pension scheme. (The cleaner opted out of the scheme on account of her age).
- i) The Civility and Respect/NALC Model Councillor Officer Protocol – a guide for councillors and officers in their working relationships with one another which seeks to reflect the principles underlying the Councillor Code of Conduct with the objective is to enhance and maintain the integrity of local government was adopted on 6 February 2023 by March Town Council. It is recommended that Councillors read this document [again] as well as the council's Standing Orders. It is apparent that not all communications/emails are being read/actioned, and items deemed urgent are not always being actioned with the necessary speed.
- j) In terms of training, the Clerk felt that the planning training had been beneficial. If any councillors felt the need for additional training, this could be discussed/arranged.
- k) The new Mayors Charity Ball account application submitted in May 2023 was finally processed in June 2024. The process had been far from straightforward. Online banking has been essential, especially since the closure of Lloyds in March. The Clerk (as RFO) has sole responsibility for all banking transactions, and sole access to the bank accounts at the current time.

- l) In light of the k) (local bank closure, above) and the need to reduce the amount of physical banking to be done, MTC no longer uses petty cash and cash is longer accepted (allotment rent, for example).
- m) The issues with the BT OnePhone cloud-based telephones are ongoing. However, the most recent issue resulted in a 2-week period during which we had no service whatsoever. Following 3 hours work of calls by the Clerk to BT on 20.1.25, the hardware was restored to factory settings so that people can call in and officers can call out. However, the issue of the answerphone message has not yet been resolved. Additionally, there is likely to be a signal issue given that the handsets work off the 4G network. The OnePhone team are suggesting that we shift to a broadband-based ‘phone system. The Clerk had a telephone meeting with BT later today to discuss a revised contract and new system.
- n) St Wendredas Closed Churchyard update; Cllr J French and the Clerk have been in discussions with Fenland District Council about responsibility for the churchyard. Complaints had been received in relation to trees within the churchyard. FDC have commissioned a Condition Survey of the walls, paths and gates. MTC and FDC are expecting tree surveys imminently. The tree works will be carried out as a matter of urgency. The Clerk will update councillors accordingly.



- p) In response to Cllr K French’s enquiry, the Clerk confirmed that she had ensured that no personal email addresses would be used for council, unless recipients are blind copied.

It was agreed that Councillor G Christy, should report to the Main March Town Council Meeting of 3 February 2025 and request them to ratify the above recommendations and all findings of this Sub-Committee.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 09:00.

Councillor G Christy..... 3 February 2025
 Mayor of March