

**Minutes of the 105<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Business Services Committee held on  
Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> June 2020 online via Zoom**

Present: Cllr A Snape (Chairman)  
Cllrs K Badham I Blazeby P Dodds A Lutley  
J Roberts D Toinko

In attendance: Cllr J Dann Town Clerk RFO & HR Officer  
Rufus Centre Manager Finance Assistant

Apologies Received: Cllr R Coleman

No Apologies Received: Cllr M A Williams

**Open Forum**

There were no items.

**1147 To note any Declarations of Interest relating to items on the agenda**  
There were no Declarations of Interest.

**1148 To Accept Apologies for Absence**  
The apologies were accepted.

**1149 Chairman's Announcements**  
There were no Chairman's Announcements.

**1150 To elect a Vice Chairman**  
Cllr J Roberts was nominated by Cllr Badham To be elected as Vice Chairman,  
this was seconded by Cllr Lutley and all were in favour.

**1151 To receive and consider the Second Interim Internal Audit Report 2019/20**  
Members agreed the report.

It was **RECOMMENDED** that the Council agree the  
Second Interim Internal Audit Report 2019/20. All  
Members were in Favour.

**1152 To receive and consider the Final Internal Audit Report for 2019/20**  
Members agreed the report.

It was **RECOMMENDED** that the Council agree the  
Final Internal Audit Report 2019/20. All Members  
were in Favour.

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**1153 To receive and agree the accounts for 2019/20**

The accounts for 2019/20 were agreed.

**1154 Questions**

There were no questions.

**Confidential Section**

In accordance with Section 1 of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings Act) the public and press to be excluded for items 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 in view of the confidential nature of the information to be discussed relating to financial and contractual negotiations and questions.

*Cllr Blazeby joined the meeting at this time.*

**1155 Rufus Report – Part 2**

(i) Members had previously been circulated an update report from the Rufus Centre Manager, Members discussed and noted the report. Members asked several questions relating to future plans and what was in place to generate income. Members also discussed the marketing promotion being planned and asked how the staff felt about re-opening the Rufus Centre with social distancing measures in place.

(iii) It was also asked when face to face meetings for the Council business would be possible. Members were advised this was being investigated and hoped to be possible soon.

Action: Town Clerk & Rufus Centre Manager

(ii) Cllr Dodds asked when the next Health & Safety meeting would be and expressed disappointment that he had not been included in the risk assessment process for COVID-19 as the Council's Health & Safety representative. The Town Clerk advised he would arrange.

Action: Town Clerk

*The Chair requested that item 11 be discussed before item 10 that was agreed.*

**1156 To note the previously agreed 2020/21 Budget**

(i) The budget was noted, Members discussed how the budget would now need to be changed as a result of the pandemic and the effect on business. The Rufus Centre Manager did not feel that figures in the expenditure part of the budget were accurate. Ways to reduce cost and increase income were discussed and it was noted that 61% of cost on the business was staff costs.

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- (ii) Members felt that despite the advice given they did not agree with the decision made by Officers not to furlough staff when they were asked to consider this under delegated powers back in March. This was despite it being clear that exceptions were permissible in the government guidance for Rufus Centre staff only as they were not funded from the precept and having checked with the Accountant, other Councils with hospitality businesses have furloughed staff. The 10<sup>th</sup> June deadline had been missed in any case and the Chairman made it clear that we must accept the situation and move on from this making the best of the situation.
- (iii) The RFO advised Members that it had been investigated when asked and had been reported to the first Council meeting in May, at that time the information provided was still not clear as to whether the Council were entitled to claim or if the funds were released, that they could be retracted at a later date. Members at that meeting had not asked for it to be investigated any further but instead talked about redeployment.
- (iv) Cllr Dodds suggested that renting rooms to schools might be an option.

It was **RECOMMENDED** that a working party including Cllr Snape, Cllr Roberts, Cllr Toinko, the RFO and the Rufus Centre Manager be formed to review the budget and a revised budget be produced which would be reported to committee. The group should also look to establish the reporting we need to ensure that there are KPIs in place to allow sound business decisions to be made. All Members were in favour.

Action: RFO & Rufus Centre Manager

- (v) Members discussed the financial performance of the solar panels as well as the outstanding Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) loan. The RFO gave a brief update covering the outstanding amounts owing on three loans. Members were not aware that there are in fact three PWLB loans in place and that these had been used to raise funding for projects other than the purchase of the Rufus Centre. Cllr Blazeby enquired if these loans had ever been refinanced as the Council were paying 4.8% interest which was not commercially competitive. The RFO confirmed they had not been refinanced. Member requested that reports be brought back to the committee on both.

It was **RECOMMENDED** that

1. The RFO provide a full report into all loans with outstanding amounts owing.

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2. The Rufus Centre Manager provide a report on the savings generated from the solar panels compared to the initial projection the company had given to the Council.

Action: RFO & Rufus Centre Manager

- (vi) A workforce review was discussed.

It was **RECOMMENDED** that the Personnel Panel consider commissioning the Town Clerk to undertake a workforce review to ensure that appropriate staffing is in place across the Council. All Members were in favour.

Action: Town Clerk & Personnel Panel

**1157 To note the Rufus Centre income from April & May**

- (i) The income for April and May was noted. The Chairman had provided a report which included charts to accompany the figures breaking down spend an income into categories to give Members a better understanding of the finances of the commercial activities. Members asked Officers various questions relating to tenant rent holidays, business rates and credit control.

It was **RECOMMENDED** that the aged debtors report produced by the accounts package be added to the Rufus income report each month that is presented to the committee. All Members were in favour.

Action: Finance Assistant

- (ii) Members discussed and asked Officers how the business might change in the future taking into account changes to working practices caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It was noted that many businesses were considering reducing their office space and that this could present a good business opportunity for hub buildings such as the Rufus Centre. Questions included plans for the café and the workforce required as well as asking Officers about feedback they had received from customers. Members also requested several reports to be brought back to the committee to allow better oversight and a clear understanding of how Officers saw the business developing

It was **RECOMMENDED** that a report from the Rufus Centre Manager be presented to the committee providing insights into where he sees the business developing taking into account the

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COVID-19 pandemic. This should be in the format of a built out SWOT analysis detailing, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the conferencing/serviced office business. All Members were in favour.

Action: Rufus Centre Manager

It was **RECOMMENDED** that a financial plan for opening the cafe be presented to the committee. All Members were in favour.

Action: Rufus Centre Manager

**1158 To agree the accounts for April & May**

- (i) The accounts for April and May were agreed.

**1159 To note and consider the Earmarked Reserves**

Members had previously been circulated the Earmarked Reserves with possible suggestions highlighted as to ones where the funds could be better redirected.

It was **RECOMMENDED** that EMRs 321, 323 and the four highlighted from 326 be returned to the General Reserves. All were in favour.

Action: RFO

It was **RECOMMENDED** that new office furniture and IT equipment be purchased for the Town Clerk as well as a new office chair for the Rufus Centre Manager to be funded from general reserves. All were in favour

Action: Rufus Centre Manager

**1160 Questions**

Cllr Blazeby asked if a Personnel Panel meeting had been planned. Members were advised that this would take place in the next couple of weeks.

Action: Town Clerk & RFO

Meeting closed at 9.17pm.

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Chairman