

FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE OF THE WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL

Held on Monday 28 January 2013

at 6pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall

Present

Councillor: Cllr Harry Eaglestone (Chairman)

Councillors: Mrs J C Baker T J Morris (6.05pm)
A K Beames B J Woodruff (6.30pm)
P J Dorward C K Woodward

Non- Committee: Ms C Curry A D Harvey
Mrs B J Churchill

Officers: Town Clerk Deputy Town Clerk
Democratic Services Officer

1 member of the press

F035 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

F036 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest in matters to be considered at the meeting.

F037 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2012 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

F038 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no members of the public present at the meeting.

F039 **PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS**

Copies of the schedule of accounts paid since the last meeting of this Committee, and of the bank reconciliation statements as at 31 October, 30 November and 31 December 2012, had been circulated. These were signed by Councillors H B Eaglestone and A K Beames prior to the meeting.

The Town Clerk confirmed that the payment for floor work in October was the remaining balance for the new floor at Madley Park Hall.

RECOMMENDED:

1) that the following schedules of accounts be approved:

Cheques	28034-28086 & BAC 1-3	in the sum of	£89,685.38	Imprest a/c
Cheques	100901-100902 & DD 1-4 SO 1-7	in the sum of	£61,319.67	General a/c

Cheques	28087-28157 & BAC 4-5	in the sum of	£70,986.42	Imprest a/c
Cheques	100903 & DD 5-6 SO 8-14	in the sum of	£8,869.20	General a/c
Cheques	28158-28214 & BAC 6	in the sum of	£71,267.56	Imprest a/c
	DD 7-9 SO 15-21	in the sum of	£9,621.02	General a/c

2) that the bank reconciliations as at 31 October, 30 November and 31 December 2012 be noted.

F040 **FINANCIAL REPORT/BUDGET SETTING**

The Committee received and considered the reports of the Town Clerk, as circulated with the agenda.

The Town Clerk remarked that this was a first draft, which would be represented with any changes to the Special Finance & General Purposes meeting on 11 February. She confirmed the details in her report, specifically that town and parish councils would not be subject to capping in the next financial year, however, this will be revisited by the Secretary of State for the following year. The Welfare Reform Act has also had an effect, in that council tax benefit has been abolished and has localised support for council tax by giving a reduced grant to local authorities and the mandate to operate their own schemes. The government has also cut funding for council tax support by 10%.

The Town Clerk confirmed that the draft budget has been set on the amended tax base, resulting in a requirement of £1,129,789 to cover expenditure (subject to ratification by Council).

With regard to the earmarked reserves, this still included a sum of £325,000 for a new access road into Windrush Cemetery. The Town Clerk was waiting to speak to an officer at West Oxfordshire District Council with regard to the Town Council's obligations under the planning application.

With regard to the revised revenue budget for 2012/13 and the draft estimates 2013/14, the Town Clerk confirmed that the recharges, as specified in the report, had been omitted until the draft budget had been agreed. The report also contained a summary of the standing committee budgets, with the Town Clerk commenting that Members should be aware of variances and the impact on the budgets going forward.

The Town Clerk reminded Members of the changes in the provision for the capital budget, which was now a rolling capital fund. In light of proposals from the committees, it was suggested that a further £150,000 be set aside for expenditure in 2013/14 and added to the precept demand. The Town Clerk confirmed that no additional expenditure for the Corn Exchange had been included in the budget, apart from the fee proposal from Oxford Inspires, and Members might wish to consider this.

The Town Clerk also advised that the general reserves had fallen below the recommended minimum level, equal to three months net expenditure, and that the Council should not continue to use reserves to balance the budget.

A Member commented that the Town Clerk should be commended on producing a budget that was fit for purpose under difficult circumstances. This was endorsed by other Members. He confirmed that the figure for the adjusted tax base agreed with the District Council. He commented on the remarks made by the Secretary of State, in which he told councils to do better, doing more with less money and advising that he would get stricter on cash limits and introducing consultation if the precept was raised by more than that considered reasonable.

The Town Clerk advised that most of the revenue budgets for the Town Council had been frozen for the last 4-5 years and that the Council had been operating within tight budgets. A Member commented that clarity on the cemetery access would be beneficial and was pleased that this was in hand.

In answer to a question, the Town Clerk confirmed that the rise in the precept was due to capital projects and because the general reserves were too low, and reiterated that the budget did not include any additional expenditure on the Corn Exchange.

A Member advised on the background to the Windrush cemetery access, commenting that until such time as planning for any changes to the Shores Green junction to the A40 was given, the impact on the entrance would not be clear and the Town Council could be required to provide an alternative access further down the line.

In response to a question, the Town Clerk confirmed that the fees for Oxford Inspires were included in the budget and part of their remit was to identify funding streams. She also confirmed that in the past the precept had been raised by 55% when funding was required for a new cemetery. A Member commented that the press and public needed to be advised of the very good reasons for an increase in the precept.

RECOMMENDED:

- 1) that the Town Clerk's reports be noted.
- 2) that the revised base revenue budget for 2012/13, as presented, be adopted.
- 3) that the estimates for 2013/14, as presented/amended following any decisions taken at this meeting, be presented to the Special Finance & General Purposed meeting and full Council on 11 February 2013 to be adopted.
- 4) that the level of funds allocated to the Rolling Capital Fund for 2013/14 be agreed at £150,000, to be funded via the precept.
- 5) that the level of the Town Council's precept be agreed at £1,129,786, subject to any amends in the budget.
- 6) that following the Council meeting on 11 February, the Council issues a press release to inform the press and public of the reasons for the increase.

(Cllr B Woodruff entered the meeting during the above discussion, being 6.30pm)

F041 **ANNUAL TOWN MEETING - FORMAT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk, as circulated with the agenda.

A Member suggested that as this meeting was a town meeting hosted by the Council it might be an idea to consider changing the format. The Town Clerk advised that different formats had been used over the years, and that this was an opportunity for the Town Council to engage with the public to inform them of what the Council had been doing. It also gave the public an opportunity to ask questions on issues of concern to them (not necessarily under Town Council control).

RECOMMENDED:

- 1) that the Town Clerk's report be noted.
- 2) that District and Council Councillors for Witney should be invited to attend.
- 3) that the Committee Chairmen prepare reports for presentation at the meeting.
- 4) that Thames Valley Police should be invited to attend the meeting.

F042 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

RESOLVED: That in accordance with section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, and as extended by Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public, including the press, be excluded from the meeting because of the confidential nature of the following business to be transacted.

F043 **COUNCIL PROPERTY, LAND & LEASES**

The Committee received and considered a verbal report from the Town Clerk.

The Town Clerk advised that she had met with the Council's agent and he was producing a report on the Council's land and leases. She was hopeful that a new proposal would be ready for presentation at the meeting on 11 February.

RECOMMENDED: that the confidential verbal report be noted.

The meeting adjourned at 6.40 pm for a meeting of the Personnel Sub-Committee.

The Finance & General Purposes Committee reconvened at 7.05 pm

F050 **STAFFING MATTERS**

The committee received and considered a verbal report of the Personnel Sub-Committee meeting held on earlier in the evening.

RECOMMENDED: that the verbal report be noted and the recommendations contained therein agreed.

The meeting closed at 7.10 pm

Chairman