

Main point arising: Town Council precept for 2014/15

MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD AT 8.00PM ON TUESDAY 7TH JANUARY 2014 IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC HALL, POYNTON

PRESENT

Chairman: Cllr C Gorst

Cllrs. G Bartos, M Beanland, L A Clarke, Mrs J Saunders, G Smith and A Smith

Also attending under SO 54: Cllr P Hoyland substituting for Cllr H Murray

39. Apologies for absence

Cllrs H Murray and M C G Sewart

40. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Other Interests

The Clerk explained that in order for members to debate and vote on the precept there is a collective request for dispensation for members signed last year which is valid until May 2015. Without such dispensation “the number of persons unable to participate in the transaction of business would be so great as to impede the transaction of the business”.

41. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 2nd December 2013

The list of attendees should include Cllr G Bartos.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting held on 2nd December 2013, as amended, are approved as an accurate record (NC)

42. Town Council's Precept for 2014/15

The Chairman began by outlining the services that are charged for under the Town Council precept. The precept is the amount that the Town Council charge residents for the services that they would not otherwise receive and are not provided by Cheshire East. These services include two play areas, a Youth Co-ordinator, an Adult and Health Wellbeing Co-ordinator, the Civic Hall and its facilities including accommodation for CAB, You and Yours etc, the provision of five PCSOs who provide excellent community support, a

Village Handyman to keep the village tidy, an Operations and Events manager who has a multitude of tasks, and the maintenance of the two Inclines.

The Clerk explained the process that is followed with the Accountant first helping to produce a provisional budget. This is then presented to each spending committee, which provides an opportunity to question and revise its own area of the budget. This is approved, subject an F&GP meeting, which then makes a recommendation to the Town Council. Cheshire East have asked to be notified of our 2014/15 precept level by 17th January 2014.

The Clerk provided a summary of his written brief concerning the Town Council's precept for 2014/15, with a recommendation then to be made to the Town Council meeting of 13th January 2014.

This year the proposal is for an increase in the precept over 2013/14 of 12.09%, but because of the slightly lower tax base this will be 12.36%. This is the rate of increase for a standard Band D household. To put this into perspective the cost of all the services provided by the Town Council amounts to just £1.14 a week - a 12p increase per week over last year.

As well as services no longer provided by Cheshire East, additional expenditure is explained by the appointment of a part time Adult Health and Wellbeing Co-ordinator late last year, a retained HR service, some adjustment for energy charges, a proposed budget of £7,000 to fund any challenge to local planning proposals and a budget of up to £5,000 to support commemorations marking the start of the First World War.

The Clerk explained the reserves and the transfer into the Rolling Capital Programme Fund (RCPF) of the anticipated 2013/14 General Reserve surplus and various earmarked reserves as outlined on p. 2 of his report. This should also mean that the Town Council would not need to apply for a loan to help fund the Civic Hall/Library project. The process to apply for a loan involves widespread consultation amongst residents.

There is also the issue of whether the Town Council should absorb half of the VAT that would apply to room hire. This would be 10%, amounting to around £4,500 for 2014/15.

The Chairman highlighted three areas where the Town Council has had to pick up expenditure from Cheshire East. These are notably CCTV provision at £11,000, the Air Quality Monitor at £4,000, and a reduction of the Cheshire East Precept Support Grant by £2,276. This is a total of £17,276, or just under half of the proposed precept increase of £36,736. Without these items the Town Council precept increase would be about 6%.

Cllr G Smith asked about developments on the issue of phasing the VAT payments on the construction project over the Financial Year as previously discussed. The Clerk explained that Paul Bayley and his finance team at Cheshire East are investigating progress payments on the building work, and

it is hoped that VAT refunds on these can be applied for quarterly by the Town Council.

Cllr Mrs Saunders asked what has happened to the Air Monitor. The Clerk has received an e-mail from Phil Mason, Environmental Protection at Cheshire East, and he has acknowledged that the monitor remains in situ but is not operational or maintained. The only readings can be taken from the diffusion tubes, and Phil Mason will be forwarding that data to the Clerk. This means there will only be a general reading and no accurate reading provided. The concern is that a baseline figure is required now to allow for any future mitigation. Following discussion including the likelihood of increased traffic levels through Poynton it was agreed that funding for the Air Quality Monitor is retained in the budget.

Cllr Clarke suggested that reference to World War One should be amended to read the First World War.

On the Neighbourhood Plan the Clerk clarified for Cllr Hoyland that there will be an Earmarked Reserve of £12,300 for Neighbourhood Planning. Of this £6,300 is the grant already received, plus an additional £6,000 from Town Council funds.

Cllr Hoyland asked what the Local Service Delivery reserves were earmarked for originally. The Clerk explained that it was thought prudent some two or three years ago to start building up a fund for the costs that would come with devolution of services from Cheshire East. This earmarked reserved has not been called upon so it is simply being transferred into the larger RCPF.

Cllr Hoyland raised his concern about protected street status which he thought was due to expire in about three years. Members discussed if the length of the protected street status may be extended, if Cheshire East may be responsible given that it is their scheme. The Chairman thanked Cllr Hoyland for drawing attention to this issue and it was agreed that consideration of protected street status is transferred to the FIED Committee.

Regarding VAT on room hire, Cllr Mrs Saunders requested the cost of room hire at other local venues be investigated.

RESOLVED: That the written report is received, and a precept of £340,629 for 2014/15 is recommended to the Town Council meeting on 13th January 2014 (NC)

The meeting concluded at 8.30 pm