

Main points arising: 2015/16 provisional budget for F&GP; Planning budget for 2015/16; Review of Financial Regulations Standing Orders.

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD AT 8.00PM ON MONDAY 1st DECEMBER 2014 AT THE CIVIC HALL, POYNTON.

PRESENT

Chairman: Cllr C Gorst

Cllrs. M Beanland, L A Clarke, B Lewis, H Murray, A Smith and G Smith

Attending under SO 54: Cllr P Hoyland, substituting for Cllr Mrs J Saunders

Attending under SO 56: Mrs S Horsman

24. Apologies for absence

Cllrs G Bartos and Mrs J Saunders

25. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Other Interests

None declared.

26. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 27th October 2014

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting held on 27th October 2014 are approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman (5 - 3 abs)

27. Provisional F&GP Budget for 2015/16

The Clerk had provided a written brief on the provisional F&GP budget for 2015/16.

In response to the budgetary provision for the CAB service Cllr Lewis suggested that the hours of operation be cut, while Cllr A Smith made the point that the Town Council can't continue to absorb rising costs. Cllrs Hoyland and Murray did not support cutting the service, and felt that at the very least Cllr Mrs Saunders should be consulted.

There followed some debate about the Town Council's budget in general. Cllr Gorst said the current estimated increase in the precept was around 6.3%.

Cllr Clarke acknowledged that the Council Tax Support Grant was being reduced by almost 24% compared to 2014/15, and that our reserves needed to be rebuilt, but argued at the same time for a nil increase in the precept. Cllr Lewis compared our provisional increase in the precept to that of Bramhall and Knutsford, which he said were considerably lower. He continued that in his view the Town Council's salary bill was out of control, and averaged £12 per hour per person. Cllr Gorst said that staff only received the increments that were due to them, plus any nationally negotiated wage settlements.

Cllr A Smith said it would be useful to see all the budget figures in one format, and not just the small stuff. In concluding the debate Cllr Gorst argued that it was too early to start scaling back the budget, saying we should stay with it.

RESOLVED: That the written report be received, with final resolution on a recommended 2015/16 precept to be decided at the Extraordinary Meeting of F&GP on 15th December 2014 (NC)

28. Planning Budget for 2015/16

The Clerk spoke to his written brief. Cllr Hoyland then gave the background to the need for a substantial budget for the Poynton Neighbourhood Plan (NP) in 2015/16. John Knight, who is advising the Town Council on the preparation of the NP, had recently estimated that £20,000 could be needed in 2015/16. Cllr Hoyland said that the delay to Cheshire East's Local Plan was an opportunity to prepare and present a Neighbourhood Plan that could then influence the Local Plan.

The Clerk had put forward a proposal whereby some £25,000 could be made available in 2015/16 for planning development in general, made up of £5,000 balance from a planning appeal costs Earmarked Reserve, £5,000 from an existing NP reserve, £10,000 surplus from a COPS reserve, £1,000 from a Green Belt Protection reserve, and a 2015/16 budget of £4,000 for planning appeal costs in the 2015/16 budget.

Cllr Hoyland said that central government was due to announce a new round of NP grants in the next few months – other grants and perhaps sponsorship were also possible to help defray the cost. Both Cllrs Clarke and Gorst supported this proposal, while the former said we would probably need to pay for professional advice in preparing the Plan, which needed to be robust, and able to withstand challenge.

RESOLVED: That the Clerk's written brief and proposal be received, and taken into account in the 2015/16 budget/precept debate at the Extraordinary Meeting of the F&GP Committee on 15th December 2014 (NC)

29. 2015/16 Precept and Council Tax Support Grant

RESOLVED: That CE Portfolio Holder for Finance, Cllr Peter Raynes' letter on the above subject, dated 20th November 2014, be received (NC)

30. Review of Financial Regulations Standing Orders

The Clerk had circulated these, and had suggested some minor changes to bring them up to date. Commenting on SO 6.1 b), Cllr Lewis objected to the Clerk having delegated authority to spend up to £2,500 from approved Town Council budgets. Instead he argued that such spending authority should rest with Committee Chairmen, and suggested that the amount be reduced to £250.

There followed some debate on this, which included the processes of cheque signing and the current system of reviewing payment schedules. Some Members thought the amount of £2,500 should remain as is, while others thought it should be reduced. Cllr Hoyland failed to see why the debate was taking place, when in his view there was no problem with the current system – the Clerk uses his discretion and in the event of doubt he would discuss payments with the appropriate Chairman.

RESOLVED: That a recommendation is made to the Town Council that the Financial Regulations Standing Order 6.1 b), concerning the Clerk's delegated authority to authorise expenditure, is amended, reducing the amount from £2,500 to £1,500 (4 for – 3 against – 1 abs)

RESOLVED: That the Financial Regulations Standing Orders, as reviewed by the Clerk, and as amended by the above Resolution, be received, and recommended for consideration by the Town Council (7 – 1abs)

31. Payment Schedule for October 2014

RESOLVED: That the Payment Schedule for October 2014 is received (NC)

32. Bank Reconciliation for October 2014

RESOLVED: That the Bank Reconciliation for October 2014, as verified and signed by the Chairman, is noted (NC)

The meeting concluded at 8.40pm