

Main points arising: Provisional Town Council budget for 2015/16; External Auditor's certificate for 2013/14; Payment schedule for September 2014.

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD AT 8.00PM ON MONDAY 27TH OCTOBER 2014 IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC HALL, POYNTON.

PRESENT

Chairman: Cllr C Gorst

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

Also attending under SO 56: Cllrs. G King, Mrs S Horsman and R E West

17. Apologies for absence

Cllr G Smith

Cllr B Lewis offered his apologies retrospectively for his non-attendance at the previous F&GP Committee meeting.

18. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Other Interests

Cllr R West declared a non-pecuniary interest in paragraph 7 of item 4 below as Director of the Peaks and Plains Housing Trust.

19. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 22nd September 2014

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting held on 22nd September 2014 are approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman (4 - 3 abs)

20. Provisional Town Council Budget for 2015/16

The Clerk had provided a written brief on the Town Council budget for 2015/16. The Clerk stressed that this is provisional, and will need to go first to each of the spending committees, and then to the F&GP Committee, who will make a recommendation on the 2015/16 precept to the Town Council.

The Chairman asked about overall expectation for this year, to March 2014 - will the Town Council be within their budget? The Clerk confirmed that expenditure thus far has been as expected, and within budget.

The Chairman queried the cost of monitoring and maintaining Poynton's CCTV network. The Clerk explained that this had been negotiated down. CE were originally going to charge for six cameras, but the Clerk noticed that CE were not charging for any cameras located in their car parks, and so agreed to charge for five cameras instead. The current annual cost of the CCTV network is £9,250. Cllr Mrs Saunders noted that the Town Council had considered providing their own CCTV provision but this is shrouded in a myriad of regulations that makes it difficult. The Clerk added that dedicated secure accommodation is also required which would not be feasible at present. Cllr Mrs Saunders said that although this could be an option for the Town Council in future, it is important to bear in mind that finding DBS-cleared volunteers to monitor our CCTV network on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights on a regular basis could also be challenging.

Cllr Lewis asked if the rent review of the Coppice Road Allotments had taken place and applied to tenants. The Clerk confirmed that it had. Cllr Lewis requested that percentage comparisons for the 2015/16 precept are avoided in CE Council Tax literature, and suggested that perhaps the CE Councillors take this up with CE.

The Chairman asked for confirmation of the figure for the Air Quality Monitor at the London Road South/Clifford Road junction. The Clerk confirmed that this was in the region of £3,500. This amount had been included in this year's budget too, but CE have been tardy in coming up with a Service Level Agreement. This has not been spent to date.

The Chairman asked about the funding for the part time Community Transport Administrator role. The Clerk confirmed that this is charged to the 3 years of grant funding from Cheshire East Council.

On the shortfall of CAB funding the Chairman asked if the Town Council would stand this if grants are not forthcoming. The Clerk said they would need to, but that the Town Council hopes to make up the shortfall by approaching previous sponsors. Every year the same scenario is faced with CAB funding. Peaks and Plains have been excellent in their constant support.

Cllr Clarke noted the continual increase in the annual precept, ahead of inflation and well ahead of pay rises and pension increases. He hoped that in other parts of the budget where not as much has been spent this year that next year's budget could be reduced accordingly. This would enable the Town Council to keep this year's increase to a more manageable level. Lots of organisations have had to accommodate static incomes. Cllr Clarke said that he appreciated that one of the ways Cheshire East have managed Council Tax charges is by transferring costs such as CCTV and the Air Quality Monitor down to Town and Parish Councils, but the Town Council does not have this option. Cllr Clarke requested that other budget lines are

considered to offset some of the increases. The Chairman said that by January 2015 there will be a clearer picture, and this could be considered at that point. The Clerk added that the budget will go to each of the spending committees, and it is up to each of those Chairmen and Committee Members to decide on their needs for 2015/16.

Cllr A Smith agreed with Cllr Clarke that a business cannot keep increasing its costs. Cllr Lewis also agreed, and said that the Town Council should be looking to constrain its spending.

Cllr Gorst said that the Town Council does have the three months of required General Reserve that they must maintain. This is at a healthy level and could be used to reduce this or next year's budget. The Clerk said that if you consider the rolling average of precept charges over the last eight years there had been three years where there was no increase, and this had led to a catch up exercise over the last five years. Cllr Lewis added that this had taken place at a time when we received double taxation refunds.

RESOLVED: That the written report and the recommendations therein are received (NC)

21. External Auditor's Certificate

Members received the External Auditor's certificate and opinion on the 2013/14 annual return, plus a minor issue arising.

The information states that on the basis of the review, "the information in the Annual Return is in accordance with proper practices."

The comparative figures disclosed for Section 1 of the Annual Return do not agree with those in the audited Annual Return for the previous year. The Clerk explained that this arose because of an incorrect entry for some IT equipment which had been recorded as income when it was in fact expenditure. The amount concerned was £3,025. The External Auditor confirmed in their report that this error does not affect the balance carried forward.

RESOLVED: That the report is received (NC)

22. Payment Schedule for September 2014

A local contractor was used to remove a wasp nest located in the flat roof of the Civic Hall, near the kitchen.

Cllr Bartos asked for an update of the expenditure involved in the Springboard Music Festival, and if the sponsors had been reimbursed. The Clerk confirmed that there were three main sponsors of the Springboard Event, namely the Town Council, Peaks and Plains and Sidney Jackson Ford. The Town Council provided £1,000, Peaks and Plains £1,000 and Sidney Jackson

Ford £500. There was a total of £2,500 main sponsorship put forward for this inaugural event. The event realised a surplus of £2,013, and this was donated to the Mayor's and the Springboard charity, the National Eczema Society. The Chairman asked about payments made for the Community Bus maintenance. The Clerk explained that Cheshire East had provided £45,000 of funding spread over 3 years, which also includes depreciation of the two vehicles.

Cllr Lewis asked when the Town Council had agreed to pay John Knight for Neighbourhood Planning advice, because Cllr Lewis thought he was working voluntarily because this was something very close to him. Cllr Clarke confirmed that payment had been agreed at a Planning Committee meeting. Cllr Clarke stressed that John Knight has done a large amount of work for the Town Council, and the payment made by the Town Council was nowhere near what would be charged by a firm of planning consultants. The Clerk confirmed also that the funding came from a central government grant of £7,000. This was also a reserve for Green Belt/planning appeal issues.

Cllr Lewis asked what services Wirehouse were being paid for, and how was Wirehouse selected by the Town Council. Cllr Clarke explained that this decision was taken at an M&E Committee meeting where there was a competitive tender. Cllr Lewis asked what the charge of £1,200 shown in the payment schedule was for. The Chairman and Clerk confirmed that this is an annual retainer for HR services that is budgeted for.

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

23. Bank Reconciliation for September 2014

RESOLVED: That the Bank Reconciliation for September 2014, verified by the Chairman, is noted (NC)

The meeting concluded at 8.25pm