

**Main agenda items: Town Council's budget/precept for 2015/16;
Payment schedule for November 2014.**

MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD AT 7.00PM ON MONDAY 15TH DECEMBER
2014 AT THE CIVIC HALL, POYNTON

PRESENT

Chairman: Cllr C Gorst

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

Attending SO 54: Cllr P Hoyland substituting for Cllr H Murray

Attending under SO 56: G King

33. Apologies for absence

Cllrs G Bartos and H Murray

34. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Other Interests

There is a collective dispensation for debating and voting on the precept, signed by all Members in September 2012, and valid until May 2015.

35. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 1st December 2014

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting held on 1st December 2014 are approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman (7 - 1 abs)

36. Town Council's budget/precept for 2015/16

Members considered a written brief from the Clerk concerning the Town Council's budget for 2015/16, with a recommendation on the 2015/16 precept to be made to Town Council on Monday 5th January 2015.

The Chairman read from a prepared brief – attached as Annex A.

This prompted a wide-ranging debate, with Members acknowledging the extra services that we are now having to pay for, the need to rebuild the Town Council's reserves, and the requirement for an adequate 'fighting fund' to

protect against inappropriate development. Other points raised during the discussion were:

- According to one Member, staff costs were higher than for similar sized towns;
- Any surpluses from community grants or grants to support Town Council events should be returned;
- Cutting a PCSO would represent a saving – other argued that the PCSO provision had made a real difference to ASB;
- A comparison of precepts set by similar sized towns for 2014/15 showed that ours was not out of step;
- It was in any case difficult to make such comparisons, since councils have different assets that they are responsible for, e.g. cemeteries, parks and leisure facilities;
- CE receives a government grant to enable them to maintain no increase in Council Tax;
- The delay in recruiting a new Youth Coordinator represented a saving;
- Any surplus from this year's budget will not be known until April 2015 – meanwhile it was prudent to make specific provision for rebuilding the reserves;
- In future years the size of the Town Council's budget should be decided by the full Town Council, and based on the level of service it felt should be provided, at competitive prices;
- CE should provide proper levels of service that they are contracted to supply, e.g. policing and parking;

The Chairman in summary said that as mentioned in discussion the services provided can be reviewed and a good time to do this is after the new Council is elected.

RESOLVED: That the provisional precept for 2015/16 of £362,168, representing a c.6% increase over 2014/15, is recommended to the Town Council meeting on Monday 5th January 2015 (7 - 1 against)

37. Payment Schedule for November 2014

The expenditure item for PC Doctor was noted, and it was suggested that the Town Council consider a tender for IT provision to obtain alternative quotes.

The Clerk explained that the invoice in question from PC Doctor was exceptional in that it included the purchase of a new desktop computer for reception and a laptop for the Community Transport Coordinator. The funding for the latter came from the CE budget for community transport and so was not a charge to Town Council funds.

In a brief discussion one Member suggested that other suppliers for capital equipment are more competitive, while another said the Town Council did not

buy huge quantities of equipment, and there needs to be a balance between the potential cost saving and staff time spent on this issue.

RESOLVED: That the Payment Schedule for November 2014 is received (7 - 1 abs)

RESOLVED: That the Clerk produce a split of new/capital equipment, software licences, maintenance and support for the current Financial Year for the Committee to consider at a future meeting and in the light of that to decide whether to continue with the current arrangement or undertake a tendering exercise (6 - 2 abs)

38. Bank Reconciliation for November 2014

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

The meeting concluded at 7.30pm

Brief from the Chairman of F&GP: Town Council Budget 2015/16

Each Committee - FIED, COPS, Planning and Environment and F&GP - has approved its individual budget for 2015/16. The Clerk, assisted by the Accountant, has pulled together these individual budgets resulting in a proposed increase in the precept over the current year of £21,539.

This can be accounted for by certain costs offloaded onto us from CE and one-off essential additional costs as follows:

£5,641 from CE, for the Air Quality Monitor costs and a 24% reduction in the Precept Support Grant. An additional amount of £15,000 into the Rolling Capital Reserve which is essential to rebuild our reserves, which will be largely depleted once the Civic Hall/Library merger is completed next year. These two items total £20,641.

Also we must bear in mind that we have, at the last minute, decided that it is imperative to have an additional sum of £10,000 available to challenge any attempt to make incursions into the Green Belt surrounding the village, which is considered to be a strong possibility, as a result of the current uncertainty regarding agreement of the Local Plan. I am sure we are all aware that local people are squarely behind us on this. This additional sum has been found by moving £10,000 from the COPS Earmarked Reserve rather than adding to the 2015/16 precept.

The Clerk has provided Precept Comparisons for the past 5 years which show that the proposed increase in the Precept for next year at 7p per week will be lower than the previous two years. The increase in the past two years was 12p per week and we had no objections to those increases from local people at the time.

In an ideal world, I am sure that we would all like to see the Precept stay at the same level each year. However, we should remember that Parish and Town Councils exist in order to provide additional services to local people which are not otherwise provided by the primary council, in our case CE. These are services which we have recognised as being desired by local people such as a Youth Co-ordinator, Adult Health and Wellbeing Co-ordinator and a Citizens Advice Bureau here in Poynton.

In the overall context of the above I am content that the proposed precept for the next Financial Year represents good value for money and that it will find approval from local people.

**Cllr C Gorst
December 2014**