

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES  
COMMITTEE HELD AT 8PM ON MONDAY 29<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2012 IN THE  
COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC HALL, POYNTON

PRESENT

Chairman: Cllr C Gorst

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

Also attending under SO 53: Cllrs. Mrs S Horsman, P Hoyland and H Murray

23. Apologies for Absence

Cllr M C G Sewart

24. Declarations of Interest

None

25. Minutes of the previous meeting

On page 104 - Cllr Clarke asked about the Excessive Council Tax Referenda and whether this applies to Town and Parish Council precepts. The Clerk said that, based on the advice he has taken from both NALC and ChALC, this would not apply, but pointed out that he has not yet had definitive information on this.

**RESOLVED: That the minutes of the F&GP meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2012 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman (6 - 1 abs)**

26. Payment Schedule for September 2012

The Clerk explained that the payment to Stone Central was for the refurbishment of the war memorial, but that the c.£4,000 cost was offset by a grant from the War Memorials Trust of c.£2,000, plus £500+ donated by local residents. VAT will also be recovered.

**RESOLVED: That the Payment Schedule for September 2012 is received (NC)**

27. Preliminary Budget Estimate for 2013/14

The Chairman wanted to consider this item in stages. Firstly a detailed look at the F&GP budget, then consideration of the Town Council budget as a whole, the Town Council reserves, and a discussion of the 2013/14 precept.

The Clerk began by outlining the F&GP budget which tends to collect the administrative type expenditure. He reported that our website management now sits with a professional webmaster. He has provided a totally revamped website, and the daily management of it - the £5,000 annual cost reflects this

On election costs the Clerk explained that the Town Council has an earmarked reserve of £5,000 specifically for elections. The proposed budget for 2013/14 is for £4,000. Assuming there is a surplus at the end of that year this would then move to replenish the election reserve as a contingency. The early cost estimate for the bye-election to fill the two casual vacancies on the Town Council is between £5,000 and £7,000, depending on whether polling cards are posted.

Budget Code 1104 – Cllr Bartos raised the issue of Mayoral Expenses which are currently set at £160. Cllr Bartos said that in his opinion this was too low to cover the number of engagements and explained that in neighbouring areas the Mayoral expenses were much higher. Councillors discussed this issue in further detail. Cllr Clarke said that he could not support any major increase. Cllr Mrs Saunders felt that the role has changed and there are now a number of regular mayoral functions, and this would come at a cost to the Mayor. It would be unfair for an elected Mayor to be out of pocket. Cllr Mrs Horsman, the present Mayor, explained that her only expense has been for church collections. Cllr Bartos confirmed that as a past Mayor he too only paid out for raffle and church collections and did not claim other Mayoral expenses. Cllr Murray suggested that for simplicity a one off nominal payment of £250 might be more appropriate. The Clerk explained that the Town Council cannot offer a Mayoral allowance, only Mayor's expenses against claims. Cllr Mrs Saunders asked if the Clerk could ascertain how for instance Knutsford have a Mayoral allowance in place. The Chairman concluded that a £250 one off payment provides a reasonable compromise. Cllr G Smith proposed the sum of £250 is set to cover Mayoral expenses next year.

**RESOLVED: That a budget of £250 is agreed for Mayoral expenses in 2013/14 (4 - 3 against)**

**RESOLVED: That the F&GP budget for 2013/14 of £130,395 is agreed (NC)**

The Clerk highlighted the changes he considered to be of significance in his overview of the Town Council budget. There is now a full time Operations and Events Manager replacing a part time role. This means that the Town Council is committed to an additional c.£12,000 per year. Also provision has been made for paying half the cost for an Adult Health and Well Being Co-ordinator at £7,500. Match funding is continuing to be sought for this position. There are also some new budgets, such as £4,000 for annual tree management. This would be in place of a tree management reserve of £18,000. There was a new £5,000 budget for web management, and an election budget of £4,000, with any surplus funds from that used to replenish the election earmarked reserve.

In his written brief the Clerk noted the potential drain on the Town Council's reserves in 2013/14. On the issue of fencing for Barnaby Park the Clerk explained that, based on a previous estimate, the cost could be in the region of c.£30,000, with an annual recurrent cost of £3,000 for security. The Chairman clarified that the fencing for Barnaby Park was not included in the FIED revenue budget but, as capital expenditure, it would be a call on the reserves.

The Chairman explained that the overall increase in the budget for 2013/14 is £22,000 over the previous year, representing an 8% increase. In this current year there is expected to be a £20,000 surplus over budget. The general reserve is currently at £80,000 and adequate at this time. The Chairman added that the current year surplus could be utilised to offset the precept increase of £22,000.

Cllr Clarke agreed with the Chairman. He said that over the last few years, through good management, the Town Council has generally managed to return positive results against the Town Council budget. Given the recent strained economic times Cllr Clarke said that in his opinion the precept should be limited to the rate of inflation (CPI) to minimise the demands on Poynton residents. The Clerk explained that one option would be to limit the precept increase to 4%, with the remaining 4% increase met from the Town Council reserves. Other Councillors argues strongly for the full increase to be applied to the precept.

The full 8% increase for an average Band D house amounts to £50.28 a year, representing a £3.73 increase over the current year, or, put another way, 7p a week. Members discussed the issue further. In addition, the Clerk pointed out other macro-issues which affect the precept, such as any change to the tax base, VAT on room hire rates, and the impact of the Civic Hall and Library merger, with the loss of the annual payment of £28,500 from Cheshire East for operating the Information Service.

Members agreed that given the issue of the tax base and other considerations, further time would be required to make a fully informed decision.

**RESOLVED: That the provisional figures for the Town Council's budget for 2013/14 are accepted, but that a final decision on the precept is deferred until the full Town Council meeting of 9<sup>th</sup> January 2013, preceded by an extraordinary F&GP meeting to be held earlier that month (date to be confirmed) (NC)**

The meeting concluded at 8.45pm