

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE HELD AT 8PM ON MONDAY 30TH JULY 2012 IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC HALL, POYNTON

PRESENT

Chairman: Cllr C Gorst

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

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

9. Apologies for Absence

Cllrs A Hall and M C G Sewart

10. Declarations of Interest

None

11. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Finance and General Purposes meeting held on the 18th June 2012 are approved and signed by the Chairman (6 – 1 abs)

12. Payment Schedule

The Clerk explained that the figure of £961.87 shown for the Poynton in Bloom floral display is their budget for the entire year.

Cllr Bartos asked for clarification on the entry for the Embrace the Games event. The Clerk explained that this was for a series of payments for this event organised by the Youth Co-ordinator, Erica Adkins, in June 2012.

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

13. Town Council's 2012/13 budget review at the end of Q1

The Clerk explained that on salaries there will be a saving on John Brooke's salary, albeit offset by payments to Les Clarke who is providing temporary cover for this role. Under advertising this budget has been exceeded. This includes advertising for an Operations and Events Officer in the regional

press, which is very expensive. The Clerk pointed out that advertising will also be required for the Ageing Well Co-ordinator's post which will again be a charge to this budget. The Clerk said he will increase this budget when it comes to setting the 2013/14 budget, to make allowances for advertising future vacancies.

On page 3 of the report the Clerk highlighted Play Areas and pointed out that the budget is being used up very quickly. This is a reflection of the ageing equipment in the parks, and the fact that it is requiring more and more maintenance. Consideration will need to be given to renewing some of the equipment in future. The Highways budget also reflects that the Town Council is picking up more and more of the work that should be carried out by Cheshire East. The Clerk informed the meeting that the Community Events budget is almost used up. This is because the bulk of events have already taken place this summer. The one event remaining is the Christmas Fest, for which the Town Council can expect to get a bid for funding.

The Clerk said the budget is pretty much where it should be at this stage, and he did not have any particular concerns as the year progresses.

Cllr Clarke noted that a third of the budget has already been spent on salaries after just one quarter. The Clerk explained that this reflects that a number of incremental increases have fallen due, including his. There will be a saving on the salaries budget, given that the Operations Officer's role will have been vacant for three months. The Chairman added that salaries are the main item in the budget.

Cllr Clarke also noted that on page 3 under Play Areas the mention of Green Belt Protection, which is associated with Planning, should perhaps be displayed under a different heading. The Clerk confirmed he would amend this accordingly.

The Chairman clarified that at the time of setting the budget any refund under double taxation was not anticipated. However, the Town Council had received a non-discretionary grant from Cheshire East of £11,000.

RESOLVED: That the Clerk's 2012/13 budget review to the end of Q1 is received (NC)

14. Preview of the Town Council's budget for 2013/14

The Clerk provided a preview of the budget for 2013/14, and the challenges within that budget year. The Clerk pointed out proposals under the Local Government's Finance Bill, which could have the effect of reducing the Town Council's tax base for precept purposes. This is a complex issue but the Clerk said he assumed that Cheshire East would keep the Town Council informed of any change in the tax base. An unreasonable precept increase can now be challenged by residents under the Government's new excessive council tax

referendum. The Chairman added that such a referendum would be very costly and time consuming.

Cllr Murray provided more detail to the effect that precepts can only be challenged if a material increase was proposed, and that precepts of under £200 would not be considered material. The Committee agreed that precept increases should always be explained in financial terms and not percentages to ensure that any change is put into context and properly understood.

The Clerk mentioned that the salaries bill will increase because of the full-time role of the Operations and Events Officer and the additional Ageing Well-Co-ordinator position. The IT budget is also likely to increase. This includes the replacement of a desktop and the necessary IT equipment for the Ageing Well Co-ordinator position.

The Clerk explained how the Rolling Capital Programme Fund will be dispersed, and said the special earmarked reserves are in good order. Although it is anticipated that the RCP Fund will be depleted, the sum of £25,000 was included in the current year precept in order to help replenish it.

On room rental hire the Clerk explained that rental income levels will need to be maintained. The Town Council income from the room rentals is already at 52.3% for this quarter so this is encouraging, but needs to continue. The Vernon Room will be subjected to a much needed makeover which would allow it to be let at a reasonable rate. Cllr Hoyland noted that it is important to maintain the rooms and facilities to maintain income levels. The Clerk explained that there is a Civic Hall maintenance budget which will allow the Vernon Room to be refurbished well as a quality letting room.

The Chairman concluded that essentially there will need to be an increase in the precept next year. The Clerk added that there may be some surpluses from this year, but 2013/14 will be a challenging budgetary year. In recent years the precept increase has averaged out at around 3.5% which is not excessive.

Cllr Clarke proposed that the Clerk find out about the council tax excessive referendum criteria to ensure that the Town Council are fully informed beforehand.

RESOLVED: That the Clerk's 2013/14 budget preview is received, and that the Clerk establishes the criteria for the Government's excessive council tax referenda (NC)

15. National Assn of Local Councils (NALC)

The Committee received a media release from the National Assn of Local Councils (NALC) of 6th July and a letter dated 10th July from NALC to the Dept of Communities and Local Government concerning council tax reforms, and to consider the potential impact of these reforms on the 2013/14 precept.

Cllr Clarke suggested that the Town Council write to David Rutley MP to inform him of the Town Council's concerns.

RESOLVED: That the Town Council write to David Rutley MP and ask him to express the Poynton Town Council's concerns (NC)

16. Friends of St George's Church

The Committee considered the request for the Town Council to become a corporate member of the Friends of St George's Church. The Chairman explained that although this was a very worthwhile cause for a number of reasons that the Town Council would not normally make such a commitment. Councillors discussed this issue in considerable detail. The significance and iconic status of St George's to Poynton, the important events that are held there, the fact that it is a beautiful well maintained listed building and the location of the War Memorial at St George's were amongst the issues raised and recognised by Councillors. Nevertheless, the Committee agreed that the Town Council could not commit to regular payment. It would also be inappropriate for the Town Council to support only one of the churches in Poynton in this way.

Cllr Clarke proposed that the Town Council decline the offer to become a corporate member of the Friends of St George's Church but that instead the Town Council make a donation of £250 towards supporting the fabric of the building.

RESOLVED: That the Town Council declines the offer to become a corporate member of the Friends of St George's Church but approves a donation of £250 towards supporting the fabric of the building (5 – 1 abs)

The meeting concluded at 8.35pm