



Minutes of a meeting of the Finance Sub Committee held in the Town Hall on Tuesday 19 October 2021 at 4pm.

Councillors present:

Desna Allen	Jenny Budgetell
Pete Cousins (Vice Chairman)	Robert Giles
Gemma Grimes	Nick Murry
John Scragg	Matthew Short (Chairman)
Myla Watts	

Officers present: Mark Smith, Chief Executive
Matt Kirby, Director of Community Services
Nick Rees, Director of Resources
Heather Rae, Head of Democratic Services
Jess Mantell, Democratic Services Officer
Amy Abram, Finance Assistant
Kingsley Walker, Halls Team

Public present: None present

In Attendance: David Poole

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no written or verbal questions from any member of the public.

11. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Declan Baseley due to work commitments.

12. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTION

Councillor Nick Murry substituted for Councillor Declan Baseley.

13. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Jenny Budgetell declared a non-pecuniary interest in any discussion regarding the Town Council's Christmas light due to knowing one of the possible providers.

14. MINUTES

The minutes from the meeting held on Tuesday 13 July 2021 were proposed by Councillor Pete Cousins, seconded by Councillor Myla Watts and with all in favour, it was;

RESOLVED that

The minutes from the meeting held on Tuesday 13 July 2021 were approved as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

15. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no Chairman's announcements.

16. UPDATE ON BUDGET SETTING FOR 2022/23

The Director of Resources updated Councillors on the progress with setting the Income and Expenditure (I&E) budget for 2022/23. It was highlighted that Full Council on 22 September looked at the potential costs of Chippenham Town Council's response to the Ecological Emergency Declaration and a motion to set up a Climate Donations Fund. The Director of Resources highlighted the assumptions and draft I&E budget in the report, noting the I&E that could potentially be contained within an inflationary increase to precept, however, the additional cost pressures of the Ecological Emergency Declaration and Climate Donations Fund would require an above inflationary Precept increase to deliver a break-even budget. It was noted that Precept income is dependent on the number of households paying precept and this information on the 'tax base' was not expected from Wiltshire Council until November 2021.

Councillor Jenny Budgell thanked the Finance team for their work and stated that whilst in favour of taking measures to combat Climate Change, the importance of considering everybody in the town was highlighted. This included residents in the town that are struggling to put food on the table and may not have the Climate Emergency as their top priority.

Councillors discussed the issues contained within the report and made the following comments and suggestions:

- No support to increase the precept beyond inflation per household paying the Precept
- One experienced Climate Officer could be proposed instead of two separate roles
- Investigate whether the subsidy for Stanley Park could be reduced, aim to increase off peak hires
- Consider future outcome of the Neeld Development Working Party, whether the Neeld is a service or profit making
- Consider cost savings in other areas to achieve climate goals, which could be implemented in a phased manner
- Revised Corporate Strategic Plan will influence future budget decisions
- Noted need to be aware of what Wiltshire Council is doing regarding the Climate and Ecological Emergency to avoid duplication of work
- Consider hiring a Town Crier for one off events instead of recruiting a Chippenham Town Crier and purchasing a uniform

Councillors discussed the separate Councillor motion proposing a Climate Emergency Fund which will be considered by Full Council. Councillors discussed further information would be required to understand function, purpose, and risk. It was suggested that the amount should be reduced to £10,000 next year as a pilot and that enquiries to be made with Wiltshire Council on whether this can be funded by CIL. Councillors considered that the total additional cost pressures of the Ecological Emergency Declaration and Climate Donations Fund motion should be limited to £90,000 in next year's budget.

The Chief Executive highlighted the ambition and spending around Climate and Ecology and noted that some budget saving proposals may involve reducing services or closing facilities, that the Council has offered for many years. It was noted that everything the Council currently do supports the Corporate Strategic Plan and what the Council does. Ideas about what will be in next Plan haven't yet been worked through or developed.

RESOLVED that

- i) Councillors noted the report and discussed the issues contained within the report.
- ii) Officers to bring a draft budget proposal to the next meeting of the Finance Sub Committee.

17. FEEDBACK ON CAPITAL EXPENDITURE PLANNING

The Director of Resources presented the report providing Councillors with feedback from various Council Committees and working parties on the composition and prioritisation of Capital/Ear Marked Funds (C/EMFs) projects for inclusion in the 2022/23 Capital Expenditure Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP). It was noted the MoSCoW method for prioritisation had been used (Must have, Should have, Could have, Won't have this time). The Director of Resources outlined that the Council have a high number of projects and cannot afford to do the entire 'Must have' list, the priorities of the Council need to be discussed.

Councillors questioned where General Reserves is being topped up from to keep it at 25% of precept in line with best practice guidance. The Director of Resources confirmed General Reserves is maintained at 25% of Precept. If the Precept goes up, by definition the Income and Expenditure (I&E) needs to generate a surplus. If the Council is to maintain General Reserves and did not generate a surplus it could transfer monies back from C/EMFs.

Councillors considered the list of Capital Projects, Councillors discussed the replacement vehicle programme and purchasing versus leasing vehicles. It was noted purchasing gives the Council more flexibility and an asset whereas leasing ties the Council in for a set period of time. Councillors highlighted there may be grants available to Town Councils for subsidising Electric Vehicle charging. Councillors noted the cost of £200,000 for a Neeld Lite project was an alternative to a separate proposition of £1.5m for Neeld redevelopment made by a consultant to an earlier Neeld Working Party. The project will be considered by the Neeld Development Working Party. Councillors questioned whether the budget for Capital was sustainable, the Director of Resources noted an amount of £450,000, in line with C/EMF income and previous years' expenditure, would be sustainable.

Councillors raised environmental projects, noting funding could be applied for, it was noted that cost return items would be prioritised, the goal of achieving net zero was highlighted. Councillors discussed the 'Must haves' and considered some 'Should haves' might need to be 'Must haves' such as Play Area Enhancements, Councillors agreed that parks and play areas move to be a 'Must have' as they are for all the people of Chippenham.

The Director of Resources highlighted that the priority for the Council is that the I&E budget and precept are agreed for 2022/23. It was proposed to consider a prudent capital budget that reflects this years' budget. Consideration will need to be given to larger capital projects and their priority.

RECOMMENDED that

- i) Councillors discussed the issues raised in the report.
- ii) Officer to revisit the Capital Expenditure budget for 2022/23 and bring recommendations to the next Finance Sub Committee meeting, together with a revised MTFP proposal.

18. ITEMS FOR COMMUNICATION

Councillors did not request any specific items for communication.

19. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Finance Sub Committee will take place on Tuesday 16 November 2021 at 4pm.

The meeting closed at 5.47pm.

These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

Signed on behalf of the Town Council as a true record of the meeting.

Signature

Date