



## WISBECH TOWN COUNCIL

### POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

9 JANUARY 2017 – 7.30 pm

#### MINUTES OF MEETING

**Present:** Councillor Tierney, Chairman; Councillors Balsevics, Mrs Bucknor, Miss Hoy, Human, Oliver, Miss Oliver and Tibbs.

**Apologies:** None.

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2016 were confirmed and signed.

#### **R10/16 Wisbech Town Council's Accounts 2016/17**

The Clerk reported to members on the council's financial position as at the end of quarter three of the financial year 2017/18; he gave explanations as to variations between the estimated income and expenditure for the third quarter of 2016/17 and the actual financial position as at 31 December 2016.

As at 31 December 2016, the council had received approximately 99% of the estimated annual income and incurred approximately 87% of its estimated annual expenditure.

The Clerk responded to members' questions.

Members decided, on the proposal of Councillor Oliver, seconded by Councillor Balsevics, that

- (1) the information reported by the Clerk be noted;
- (2) the accounts for the third quarter of the financial year 2016/17 be approved.

#### **R11/16 Green Flag accreditation**

Members considered a request from Fenland District Council (FDC) for Wisbech Town Council to meet the cost (currently met by FDC) from 2017 onwards of making application for award scheme this insofar as it relates to Wisbech.

Fenland District Council states that the cost for submitting an application each of the two sites in Wisbech - those being Wisbech Park and the gardens of the St Peter and St Paul's Church - is £314.00 (plus VAT); the total cost in 2017 would, therefore, be £628.00 (plus VAT).

Members are of the opinion that being able to achieve Green Flag accreditation for these sites is a "feather in the cap" for Wisbech and they would not wish to see this accreditation being lost as a result of Fenland District Council no longer being able, because of budget reductions, to meet the cost of the application fees for the Green Flag award scheme.

Members decided, unanimously, on the proposal of Councillor Mrs Bucknor, seconded by Councillor Oliver, that Wisbech Town Council would meet the cost of making applications for Green Flag accreditation in respect of the two sites in Wisbech in 2017 and that the situation be reviewed on an annual basis.



## **R12/16 Budget 2017/18**

Further to minute R9/16, Members undertook further discussions regarding the setting of a Wisbech Town Council budget (and Precept) for the financial year 2017/18.

The Clerk reminded members that this committee had decided at minute R9/16 that

- (1) the Clerk would produce a draft budget for the financial year 2017/18, for consideration by 9 January 2017 meeting this committee, on the basis of making provision for the areas of additional spending identified by members (increase in the level of grant funding, an increase in the salaries budget to fund the outcome of the job evaluation exercise, the introduction of a repairs and maintenance budget for the Town Hall) but aiming to minimise, through seeking to identify reductions in other areas of spending, the level of increase in the Precept;
- (2) a disability access survey of Wisbech Town Hall be undertaken, following which the council would consider if any works would be required to ensure that the council is able to meet both its legal obligations and the needs of its service-users;
- (3) the job evaluation exercise be completed by the Clerk and the Leader of the Council by the end of January 2017.

The Clerk informed members that, in pursuance of minute R9/16, he had examined carefully the council's current budget/spending and concluded that, although an extremely thorough exercise had been undertaken for budget-setting for the 2016/17 financial year (and budgets were "stripped back" as far as possible at that time), there is scope for reducing some of the current budgets (in addition to those reported to the committee at minute R9/16) in 2017/18; these had been reflected in the draft budget for 2017/18, which had been circulated to members in advance of the meeting and include:

- a) deletion of the financial provisions for parking issues in relation to the Market Place (there has been no spend in 2016/17)
- b) reducing the financial provision for Town Hall equipment
- c) reducing the provision for Training
- d) making no provision for possible "inflationary" increases to utilities costs.

With regard to d) above, the Clerk suggested to members at the meeting that, having regard to the expenditure figures for the third quarter of 2016/17, as reported to members at minute R10/16 above, it would be inappropriate to not increase the financial provision for utilities costs for the Town Hall. Consequently, members agreed that the budget figure be increased (from £3,000) to £3,300 for 2017/18.

Members were informed by the Clerk that a consequence of making provision in the 2017/18 budget for increased salary costs (agreed at minute R9/16, as a result of the pending job evaluation exercise), it had been necessary to increase also the budgetary expenditure in relation to Employer's NI and Pension contributions. With regard to pension contributions, a recent valuation of the Cambridgeshire Pension Fund has indicated, in draft results, that this council's level of contribution would need to increase (from 31.8%) to 33.4% of staff salaries in 2017/18. This level of increase is included in the draft budget.

With regard to part (2) of the decision at minute R9/16, officers of the council are seeking to identify a person/company with the relevant expertise to undertake a disability access survey of Wisbech Town Hall. Once undertaken, the results of that survey will be made known to the members of Wisbech Town Council, who would then need to consider what action to take, if any were needed, in that regard. They would also need to consider any associated funding requirements.



With regard to completion of the job evaluation exercise by the end of January 2017 (part (3) of the decision at minute R9/16 refers), the Clerk informed members that the Leader of the Council is in the process of seeking to obtain, from the Human Resources Team at Fenland District Council, the necessary documentation to be able to calculate the “value” of the jobs of the council’s officers (with the exception of the Clerk) for the purpose of ensuring that they receive the correct levels of salary.

As was reported to 19 December 2016 meeting of Wisbech Town Council (minute 108/16 refers), Cambridgeshire County Council decided on 13 December 2016 to overturn the policy of switching-off street lighting across the County between 2.00 am and 6.00 am. This means that the financial provision which had been made in Wisbech Town Council’s 2016/17 budget to meet the costs of keeping lights illuminated between 2.00 am and 6.00 am would not be required in 2017/18. However, given the likelihood that local councils will need to take on the running of additional public services/facilities as a consequence of the principal authorities needing to reduce their budgets, the Clerk had included (since minute R9/16) within the 2017/18 draft budget a Localism Reserve (of £10,000) for such eventualities.

The majority of members of the committee do not support the introduction of a Localism Reserve in the budget for 2017/18 – because of not wishing to increase the financial burden upon households to provide “in case” funding - and, consequently, the Clerk was requested to delete that item from the draft budget which would be presented to 23 January 2017 meeting of Wisbech Town Council.

At minute R9/16 the Clerk had informed the committee that that although there is currently no capping applied to Parish Precepts, the Government has indicated, through its consultation paper “The 2017/18 Local Government Finance Settlement”, that it is minded to apply referendum principles to larger, higher-spending Town and Parish Councils with effect from 2017/18. It is understood that the Government is no longer pursuing proposals to extend “capping” to Parish Precepts for the financial year 2017/18. However, there is no guarantee that this situation would not be considered again in future years and the Clerk suggested to members that they need to be mindful of that fact when setting a Precept.

To assist members’ deliberations, the Clerk reminded members that the council’s 2016/17 Precept is £235,554.00; this equates to £39.10 per Band D property. In addition, he informed members

- of the estimated number of Council Tax chargeable dwellings in Wisbech for the financial year 2017/18 and the number in each of the Council Tax Bands A to H;
- that the number of Band D equivalent properties in Wisbech, for the purpose of calculating the average Council Tax (and Precept), is estimated at 6,149 for 2017/18; the figure for the current financial year was 6,024;
- that the level of Parish Precept set across the local councils in Fenland in 2016/17 range from £32.87 to £86.06 for Band D Council Tax properties;
- that according to research undertaken by the Department for Communities and Local Government, the national average Parish Precept set by a local council in 2016/17 is £57.40 (an average increase of 6.1% over the 2015/16 figure);
- that, as was reported to council at minute 48/16 (2), the Council Tax Support Grant (CTSG) received from Fenland District Council (of £36,849.00 in the current financial year) would be phased out over the next three financial year and that, consequently, CTSG payment to Wisbech Town Council for 2017/18 would be reduced to £24,566.00 (it would reduce to £12,283.00 in 2018/19 and cease in 2019/20).

The Clerk reminded members of the importance of the council possessing an appropriate level of financial reserves and informed members of that, according to the Practitioners’ Guide to Local Council Governance, it is recommended that a local council should possess, as general reserves, a sum equating to three to twelve months of its gross annual expenditure.



Members acknowledge that an increase in the Precept for 2017/18 is necessary, given the decisions made both at minute R9/16 and at this minute.

However, the work that has been undertaken by the Clerk to seek to minimise the level of increase in Precept has resulted in the production of a budget which requires an increase in the 2016/17 Precept of £235,554 (by £29,820) to £265,374 for 2017/18.

This equates to the Precept for a Band D property of £43.16 for the financial year 2017/18; an annual increase of £4.06 (or 10.4%) to the 2016/17 figure. The additional cost to the occupiers of a Band D equivalent property would be approximately 7.8 pence per week. More than half of the properties in Wisbech are in Council Band A; those households would face an increase of 5.2 per week.

Members decided, on the proposal of Councillor Miss Hoy, seconded by Councillor Tibbs, to RECOMMEND to 23 January 2017 meeting of Wisbech Town Council that the draft budget for the financial year 2017/18, as presented by the Clerk, requiring a Precept for that financial year of £265,374.00 be approved.

(Councillors Balsevics, Mrs Bucknor, Miss Hoy, Human, Oliver, Miss Oliver, Tibbs and Tierney declared their respective pecuniary interest in the setting of the Town Council Precept, by virtue of having a beneficial interest in a domestic dwelling within the town, but had been granted a dispensation to speak and vote in this matter)

**Meeting finished at 8.35 pm.**

Signed.....

Dated .....