



WISBECH TOWN COUNCIL
POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

6 NOVEMBER 2017 – 7.30 pm

MINUTES OF MEETING

Present: Councillor Oliver, Chairman; Councillors Balsevics, Hill, Miss Hoy, Maul, Miss Oliver, Tibbs and Tierney.

Apologies: Councillor Human.

In attendance: Councillor Wing (as an observer).

Public Participation: None requested.

The minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on 9 October 2017 were confirmed and signed.

R15/17 Safer Fenland CCTV: Service Level Agreement and funding for 2018-2021

Members considered renewal of the Service Level Agreement (SLA) between Fenland District Council and Wisbech Town Council in relation to the provision of CCTV in Wisbech and the associated financial contribution required of the Town Council in that regard.

The current agreement, which has a term of three years and requires the council to provide funding of £26,850 per annum, expires on 31 March 2018. Fenland District Council (FDC) is inviting Wisbech Town Council to enter into a new SLA, to operate for the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2021, at the same annual cost (of £26,850).

The letter of invitation from FDC, which the Clerk had circulated to members in advance of the meeting, detailed the improvements which FDC had made to the CCTV service over the period of the current SLA and the positive impact that this service is achieving, through the reductions in the levels of anti-social behaviour and alcohol-related incidents etc, in making Wisbech town centre a safer place to live, work and visit. The letter states that the Fenland CCTV team had been able to respond to more than 4,700 incidents in Wisbech since April 2015 and, as a result had secured more than 1,000 arrests and fines, as well as supporting local events and town centre management.

Councillor Tierney expressed the opinion, which was shared by other members, that Fenland District Council could do more to improve public awareness of the effectiveness of the CCTV system. He made reference to the CCTV performance updates provided to Wisbech Town Council on a monthly basis and suggested that such information be made available in a format which could be accessible by the public via social media.

Members decided, unanimously, on the proposal of Councillor Miss Hoy, seconded by Councillor Balsevics, that

- (1) Wisbech Town Council would enter into a Service Level Agreement with Fenland District Council, for a period of three years commencing on 1 April 2018, in relation to the provision of CCTV in Wisbech, at an annual cost to the council of £26,850;
- (2) the offer of Councillor Oliver, to liaise with the relevant officers at Fenland District Council to improve public awareness of the effectiveness of the CCTV system, be accepted.



R16/17 Section 106 Planning Obligations expenditure on leisure and recreation

Councillor Miss Hoy informed members that Councillor Tierney had been liaising with officers of Fenland District Council (FDC) to identify any Section 106 Planning Obligation monies which would be available for leisure and recreation facilities in Wisbech, with a view to securing the spending of that money on providing additional play equipment etc. As a result, Mr P Hughes, the Head of Leisure Services at Fenland District Council, had identified £76,000 of Section 106 Planning Obligation monies which is available for such spending and is now asking Wisbech Town Council for a list of schemes to which this funding could be utilised (and to suggest the allocation of a financial sum for each possible scheme); FDC would then develop appropriate schemes in accordance with the wishes of the Town Council. Mr Hughes has indicated that it may be possible to obtain grant funding, from organisations such as WREN, to add to the funding which is already available.

Councillor Miss Hoy had produced a draft proposal for potential schemes, upon which she had consulted members of this council in advance of the meeting. As a result of that exercise, she submitted the following proposal to this committee for consideration:

1. Bath Road Skateboard Park (allocation of £35,000 of the Section 106 Planning Obligation monies)

Councillor Miss Cobb had met with providers who have said that a very new and exciting skateboard park could be provided for 70,000; this could be funded by using £35,000 of the Section 106 Planning Obligation monies, which could be match funded through an application for WREN funding.

2. Jasmine Close Spider Park (allocation of £15,000 of the Section 106 Planning Obligation monies)

Circle Housing had indicated that it would be interested in helping to match fund or at least provide some money towards a project. Councillors Miss Hoy and Tibbs would be meeting on 9 November 2017 with officers of Circle Housing and a play equipment supplier which had indicated that a very good scheme could be implemented at a cost of around £20,000.

3. Improved play equipment in the Town Park (allocation of £20,000 of the Section 106 Planning Obligation monies)

The Head of Leisure Services at Fenland District Council had indicated a desire to improve the offer at Wisbech Town Park/Clarkson ward. We would like to make available £20,000 to re-locate the zip wire to a central location and repair it, as well as providing another one or two pieces of play equipment.

4. West Parade/Burcroft Road: install play equipment (allocation of £6,000 of the Section 106 Planning Obligation monies)

Although none of the Section 106 Planning Obligation monies held by Fenland District Council (FDC) for leisure and recreation provision relates specifically to the Peckover ward, Councillor Miss Oliver had indicated a desire to improve the play equipment at the end of Burcroft Road. Match funding could also be sought by FDC, which would enable improvement of this play area.

Councillor Tierney expressed the opinion that this opportunity is great news for the people of Wisbech and he is extremely pleased that it should be possible to have a new skateboard park in operation at Bath Road by next summer.



Members decided, unanimously, on the proposal of Councillor Miss Hoy, seconded by Councillor Miss Oliver, that

- (1) the items listed at 1 to 4 above (that being Wisbech Town Council's order of priority for delivery) be submitted to Fenland District Council (FDC) as the response to that council's request for Wisbech Town Council to identify potential schemes for utilisation of the Section 106 Planning Obligations currently held by FDC for leisure and recreation provision in Wisbech;
- (2) the Clerk to Wisbech Town Council would liaise with the Head of Leisure Services at Fenland District Council on the issue of a press release, to make the public aware of this very positive situation, brought about by the collaboration of the two councils, for the people of Wisbech.

R17/17 Budget 2018/19

Further to minute R14/17, members undertook preliminary discussions regarding the setting of a Wisbech Town Council budget (and Parish Precept) for the financial year 2018/19.

The Clerk had produced an initial draft budget for the financial year 2018/19 budget, which he had circulated to members in advance of the meeting; it is based upon the current year's budget but takes into account known and estimated additional costs, as well as anticipated reductions in income which the council would for could face in future financial years.

The Clerk also presented a report which drew members' attention to a number of matters relevant to the setting of a budget (and Parish Precept) for the financial year 2018/19, including:

- there would be a need to make financial provision for operational and management costs in relation to Wisbech Castle, as well as loan re-payments to Cambridgeshire County Council; say, a financial provision of £20,000 to £25,000 as a minimum
- the level of Council Tax Support Grant which is paid to Wisbech Town Council by Fenland District Council reduced from £36,849.00 in 2016/17 to £24,566.00 in 2017/18 and reduces again to £12,283.00 for 2018/19 and then ceases from 2019/20. In the current financial year the council managed to off-set the reduction in this grant through savings in the cost of insurance cover and needing to spend significantly less on the funding of street lighting than had been estimated (because of a change of policy by the County Council in that regard). It would not be possible to off-set the reduction in Council Tax Support Grant in future financial years
- the council needs to take action in respect of the comments of both the internal auditor and external auditor in relation to budget-setting and the level of general reserves held by the council (minute R11/17 refers). 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
- given the council's stated ambition to make its community events and festivals bigger and better each year, together with the fact that Fenland District Council would like to see (but has no funding) concerts and other entertainment taking place in the bandstand at Wisbech Park, members indicated at minute R14/17 that they wish to increase the current budget (of £20,000) to £25,000
- increased provision is needed in relation to utilities' costs; for example the current budget for the Town Hall is £3,300; expenditure in 2016/17 was in excess of £4,000
- since the financial year 2016/17, the council has been "saving, into an ear-marked" reserve, monies to meet the cost of the all-out local council elections in May 2019 (in the financial year 2019/20) and any Wisbech Town Council by-elections over that four years period. As a result of needing to meet the costs of by-elections over the last couple of years, it is anticipated that the amount "in the pot" at the end of 2017/18 will be approximately £5,000 (instead of a potential



£20,000). It is, therefore, necessary to increase the provision (beyond £10,000 per annum) for the financial years 2018/19 and 2019/20 to replenish that reserve

- the council may wish to consider whether the council's Grants budget is sufficient for a town of this size. Members will be aware that the grant funding received from certain sources (such as Fenland District Council) to some local organisations/groups is likely to be reduced; therefore, those organisations/groups may look to Wisbech Town Council for a greater level of financial support from 2018/19 onwards. Wisbech Town Council agreed to include in its 2017/18 an additional £15,000 for that financial year to provide an increased level of financial support to the Wisbech and Fenland Museum. It is assumed that the council would wish to continue such financial provision in 2018/19
- in the light of the decision at 30 October 2017 meeting of the Assets Management Committee to take on the lease for the car parking area to the rear of the Queen Mary Centre (minute A16/17 refers), budgetary provision needs to be made for the costs of maintenance, business rates and insurance for that asset
- the 2018/19 budget also needs to take into account the fact that the Assets Management Committee decided on 30 October 2017 to close the Ladies and Gents elements of the toilet block at Exchange Square and to seek quotations for refurbishment of the Disabled toilet and thereafter make that facility available for all members of the public (minute A14/17 refers)
- the budget for 2018/19 needs to take into account the decision of the Staffing Committee, at minute S4/17, to implement the results of the job evaluation exercise.

The Clerk informed members also that

- according to research undertaken by the DCLG, the national average Parish Precept set by a local council in 2017/18 is £61.03 (an average increase of 3.63% over the 2016/17 figure).
- the current Precept of Wisbech Town Council is £265,374; this equates to £43.16 for a Band D property
- the total number of Council Tax chargeable dwellings in Wisbech for the financial 2018/19 is estimated (by Fenland District Council) at 8,156; this "converts" to 6,294 Band D equivalent properties for the purpose of calculating the average Council Tax
- until the financial year 2016/17 Wisbech Town Council had not increased its Parish Precept since the financial year 2012/13; in fact the level was reduced by 1.2% for the 2015/16 financial year. This council's Precept was increased by 13.46% for the financial year 2016/17. The Precept for 2017/18 was increased by £4.06 (or 10.4%) for a Band D property (The additional cost to the occupiers of a Band D equivalent property was approximately 7.8 pence per week. More than half of the properties in Wisbech are in Council Band A; those households faced an increase of 5.2 pence per week).
- every 1.0% increase in the council's current level of Precept generates approximately £2,654 in income.

The draft 2018/19 budget which had been produced by the Clerk shows an increase in the Precept from £265,374.00 in the current financial year to £335,037.00 for the financial year 2018/19. The financial increase of £69,663 equates to a 26.2% increase over the current year's figure. Dividing that level of financial increase over 6,294 Band D equivalent properties equates to an increase per such household of £11.07 for the year; an increase of less than 21.3 pence per week.

The Clerk responded to members' questions in relation to the information that he had reported.

Councillor Tierney commented that it is important that this council possesses sufficient financial resources to be able to deliver effectively against all of its commitments and ambitions. There is a need to ensure that not only is there sufficient funding available to meet known and anticipated costs but to be in a position to be able to deal with any "surprises" in a way which would not cause a difficult financial situation for the council.



Councillor Tibbs expressed the opinion that the draft budget prepared by the Clerk may be too “lean”, particularly given the additional costs which would be faced by the council in operating, managing and developing both existing and additional community assets.

Councillor Miss Hoy stated her concurrence with the comments of both Councillors Tibbs and Tierney and she suggested that there are some elements within the overall budget where it would be prudent to increase the level of financial provision; for example, expenditure in relation to Wisbech Castle. Councillor Miss Hoy suggested that the financial provision in that regard be set at £35,000 (instead of the £25,000 which had been included by the Clerk in the draft budget).

There was consensus among members that setting a budget for 2018/19 which required a 35% increase in the Precept would place the council in a safer position in terms of being able to deliver effectively against all of its commitments and ambitions.

Members decided, on a proposal by Councillor Miss Hoy, seconded by Councillor Tierney, that

- (1) the Clerk would produce, having regard for the comments made by members at this meeting, a revised draft budget for the financial year 2018/19, for consideration at 8 January 2018 meeting this committee, on the basis of making provision for the areas of additional spending identified by members (for example, costs associated with operation, management and renovation of Wisbech Castle; an estimated increase in insurance costs as a result of taking on additional community assets; increase in the cost of utilities; the need to replenish the ear-marked reserve for elections etc) and compensating for reductions in income (a lower level of Council Tax Support Grant etc);
- (2) they would be comfortable with an increase in the Precept of around 35% for the financial year 2018/19 (this would equate to an increase for a Band D equivalent property of £14.76 for the year; an increase of less than 28.4 pence per week;
- (3) with regard to the comments of both the internal auditor and external auditor in relation to budget-setting and the level of general reserves held by the council (minute R11/17 refers), the council would be asked to agree formally a level of general reserves which it considers, based upon its experience of the authority’s finances, is appropriate for Wisbech Town Council (say, £60,000).

(Councillors Balsevics, Hill, Miss Hoy, Maul, 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 8.00 pm.

Signed.....

Dated.....