



WISBECH TOWN COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

18 MAY 2020 – 8.35 pm (held using the Zoom video conferencing system)

MINUTES OF MEETING

Present: Councillor Oliver, Chairman; Councillors Hill, Miss Hoy, Lynn, Tibbs, Tierney and Mrs Wallwork.

Apologies: None (all members were present).

Public Participation: None requested.

The minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on 6 January 2020 were confirmed, for signature by the Chairman when possible.

R1/20 Election of Chairman

On the proposal of Councillor Miss Hoy, seconded by Councillor Lynn, it was decided that Councillor Oliver be elected as Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee for the municipal year 2020/21.

R2/20 Election of Vice-Chairman

On the proposal of Councillor Miss Hoy, seconded by Councillor Tibbs, it was decided that Councillor Lynn be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee for the municipal year 2020/21.

R3/20 Wisbech Town Council's Accounts 2019/20

The Clerk (and RFO) reported to members on the council's financial position as at the end of quarter four (year-end) of the financial year 2019/20; he gave explanations as to variations between the estimated income and expenditure for the fourth quarter of 2019/20 and the actual financial position as at 31 March 2020.

As at 31 March 2020, the council had received 96.35% of the estimated annual income and had incurred 88.65% of its estimated annual expenditure.

Members' attention was drawn, by the Clerk, to the fact that the council's actual income had been £16,232 below that estimated; however, actual expenditure had been £81,581 below that estimated; this had resulted in a "trading surplus" for the financial year 2019/20 of approximately £65,349.

The Clerk informed members that, unless ear-marked for specific purposes, any such surplus adds to the council's general financial reserves.

The council's bank accounts show that the council had approximately £303,000 at the end of the financial year (including the £65,349 mentioned above).

Members' concurred with the opinion of the Clerk (and RFO) that it is necessary for the council to ear-mark, from within that sum of £303,000, the following reserves (to be carried forward into the financial year 2020/21):



- (1) £13,000 for works to Wisbech Market Place (the current balance of the sum which had been provided by Fenland District Council to the Town Council upon transfer of ownership of Wisbech Market Place to the Town Council)
- (2) £133,193 for works to Wisbech Castle (the current balance of the £150,000 loan provided by Cambridgeshire County Council)
- (3) £14,390 for enhancement of Wisbech town centre (Section 106 Planning Obligations monies provided by Tesco, which had been released to Wisbech Town Council by Fenland District Council).

Based upon the council's financial position as at the financial year-end 2019/20 and taking into account the level of ear-marked reserves listed above (totalling £160,583), the council's level of general reserves as at the year-end 2019/20 would be approximately £142,000.

Members noted from the Staffing budgets that there had been a total underspending of circa £28,500 during the financial year 2019/20; the primary reason for that situation is there had been staff vacancies for much of that financial year. Because of that situation, it had not proved possible for both the Town Clerk and the Administrative Services and Civics Officer to use the majority of their annual leave allocation for that year.

The Clerk informed the committee that the Leader of the Council and the Chairman of the Staffing Committee had jointly asked him to produce a report which requests the members of the Staffing Committee to agree that the two members of staff mentioned above receive payment in lieu of their 2019/20 unused annual leave allocation.

Even after incurring those costs, the council would still achieve a significant saving in the 2019/20 Salaries budgets; still in excess of £20,000; leaving general reserves somewhere between £130,000 and £135,000.

The Clerk (and RFO) responded to members' questions on the council's income and expenditure position as at the end of the financial year 2019/20. Members thanked the Clerk (and RFO) for the detail and clarity of the information that he had provided and for the manner in which the council's financial position is being managed.

Members decided that

- (1) the information reported by the Clerk (and RFO) be noted;
- (2) the council's accounts as at the end of the financial year 2019/20 be approved and that, in accordance with minute R3/19, a copy of the report presented by the Clerk be signed by the Chairman when possible;
- (3) the council's ear-marked reserves at the end of the financial year 2019/20, as listed above, in the total sum of £160,583, be approved;
- (4) in accordance with the request of both the Leader of the Council and the Chairman of the Staffing Committee, the Clerk would present recommendations to the members of the Staffing Committee in relation to making payments to staff in lieu of their respective 2019/20 unused annual leave allocation.



R4/20 Wisbech Town Council's Accounts 2020/21

The Clerk (and RFO) invited members to consider, from a risk and financial management perspective, the potential impact that the Covid-19 pandemic could have upon the council's finances.

The point was made by the Clerk that, at this stage, being relatively early in the financial year and with the uncertainty as to when the council's activities would return to "normal", it is difficult to predict with any accuracy what impact the pandemic would have upon the council's financial position in the financial year 2020/21.

The Clerk (and RFO) commented that what is known is that there would certainly be a reduction in the amount of markets (including car boots) income; the weekly income currently (for food stalls only) is £239, compared to £886 for usual levels of weekly trading; a difference of £647 per week. It is possible that the Government would, if the lobbying activities of NABMA are successful, revise the guidance to allow stalls at outdoor markets which sell items other than food (such as plants, pet suppliers, cycle spares) to begin trading again; this would then enable additional income to be generated by Wisbech Market.

Members were informed by the Clerk (and RFO) of the likelihood that, because of cancellations of activity and bookings, there would be reductions in the amount of income from community events and festivals (estimated in the 2020/21 budget at £3,000) and Wisbech Castle (estimated in the 2020/21 budget at £9,000). There would, however, be savings on the events expenditure budget (of £30,000) because of the cancellation, so far, of WisBEACH Day and the Wisbech Rock Festival.

The Clerk (and RFO) made the point that it is fortunate, in terms of mitigating against reductions in income, that the council had managed to achieve, through prudent financial management over the last couple of years or so, an increase in its level of general financial reserves (to which reference is made at minute R3/20 above).

Members decided that the information reported by the Clerk be noted and the situation be kept under review for as long as necessary.

R5/20 Grant applications

Members considered the grant applications which had been submitted to Wisbech Town Council, for funding from the council's 2020/21 budget for small grants, as well as allocation of the council's special grants budget for that year.

The Clerk reminded members that Wisbech Town Council's budget for 2020/21 (agreed at minute 131/19 refers) includes a sum of £7,000 (increased from the £6,000 figure which had been the allocation for the financial year 2019/20) for small grants and £36,000 (increased from the £35,000 figure which had been the allocation for the financial year 2019/20) for special grants.

The Clerk presented to members a summary of the small grant applications received by the council for consideration for the 2020/21 financial year, as set out below.

	Organisation	Purpose of grant	Amount requested
1.	Wisbech Music Society	Contribution towards the costs of musicians' fees, insurance, hire of venues, publicity for events etc	£200 (the full cost of the project)



2.	Relate (in Fenland)	Contribution towards the cost of helping couples, families and individuals make relationships work better	£750 (the full cost of running the service is not specified but the point is made in the application that the remainder of the costs would be met by charitable donations)
3.	Friends of Wisbech Bandstand	Contribution towards the cost of promoting and running events (posters, banners and meeting the performers' transport costs) at Wisbech Bandstand	£250 (the full cost of the project)
4.	Cambridgeshire Search and Rescue (CamSAR)	Contribution towards the cost of purchasing 3 hand-held thermal imaging cameras to help find missing persons at night	£500 (out of a total project cost of £9,000)
5.	The Cambridgeshire Shrievalty Trust (The Bobby Scheme)	<p>Contribution towards the cost of delivering a crime reduction programme, which supports particularly the most vulnerable members of society who are either the victims of burglary, domestic abuse and other crimes, or are concerned about home and personal safety</p> <p><i>NOTE: At minute 68/19 the Town Council decided that the Bobby Scheme be awarded £1,000 in the financial year 2019/20 and that this committee would consider the allocation of special grants funding to the Bobby Scheme from the financial year 2020/21 onwards</i></p>	<p>No particular sum is requested but the point is made in the application that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £6,950 had been spent on supporting victims of crime and domestic abuse in Wisbech during the period 1 November 2017 to 31 October 2018 • £6,800 had been spent on supporting victims of crime and domestic abuse in Wisbech during the period 1 November 2018 to 31 October 2019
6.	Trinity Methodist Church Coffee Bar	Contribution towards the cost of providing Food Hygiene Level 2 training for 12 volunteers; supporting vulnerable adults with volunteering opportunities and as "customers"	£200 (out of a total project cost of £480)
7.	WisARD	Contribution towards the running costs (rent, heating,	No specific sum is requested but the letter of



		lighting, IT maintenance and telephone costs)	request states that the annual running costs are in the region of £2,000
8.	50 Backpacks	Contribution towards the cost of providing food and essential items (not specifically as part of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic) to local homeless people	£350 (total cost of the project)
	TOTAL		£2,250 (does not include a specific sum for application numbers 5 and 7)

The Clerk informed members that the groups listed at 1 (£200) and 2 (£750) in the table above both received small grants funding from Wisbech Town Council in the financial year 2019/20 (amounts shown in brackets). Application number 5 had been funded (£1,000) in the financial year 2019/20 from the special grants budget.

Members were also informed by the Clerk that an application had been received from the Girls Venture Corps Air Cadets (Wisbech), seeking £750 (out of a total cost of £1,500) towards the costs of participating in the annual Girls Venture Corps and Air Cadet Camp; however, the application had subsequently been withdrawn because of cancellation, as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, of this year's camp.

The Clerk reminded members that this committee had approved, at minute R17/18, an application from Groundworks East, on behalf of a collective of community groups and organisations (including Groundworks East, Wisbech Town Council, Rosmini Centre, Fenland District Council, Cambridgeshire County Council, Everyone Health, CP Learning Trust and community representatives) for £300 towards the cost of delivering a Wisbech International Food Day event, Fenland District Council, using its Healthy Fenland Fund, also provided £150 towards the costs involved. The event took place on 14 September 2019 and had been very successful; it was well attended and achieved the objective of enhancing community integration through a shared love of food.

Because of the success of the 2019 Wisbech International Food Day event, the collaborative partners had begun planning for a 2020 event and like the council's ambitions for each of its events, to make it bigger and better each year. A provisional date for September 2020 had been planned; however, given "arrival" of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is planned to delay the public event to the spring of 2021. It is proposed to run some on-line activities between now and then to "whet the appetite" of the public for the actual event next year.

The Clerk "flagged-up" the fact an application for funding from Wisbech Town Council towards the cost of delivering a 2021 Wisbech International Food Day event is likely to be received later this year. He suggested that if members are happy, at the time of the application, to provide funding towards the cost of the next event and that the event continues to be successful, members may wish to add the Wisbech International Food Day event to the "standing list" of special grants; thereby removing the need for applications to be made on an annual basis.



Members were reminded by the Clerk that the council's guidance to applicants for grant funding states that Wisbech Town Council will look at the following issues when assessing funding requests: contribution to social, environmental, economic wellbeing, community involvement and activities, social inclusion, any previous funding, purpose of the organisation and the nature of the assistance requested.

Members – being mindful that the Covid-19 pandemic situation could impact upon the delivery of some of the activities or projects for which small grant funding had been sought or special grant funding is being allocated - decided that

- (1) the details of the small grant applications submitted to Wisbech Town Council for the financial year 2020/21 be noted;
- (2) small grant application numbers 1 (£200), 2 (£750) and 4 (£1,000 (although £500 requested)) and 6 (£200) be approved;
- (3) small grant application number 5 be not approved as a small grant application but be funded as a special grant;
- (4) the following small grant applications be not supported, for the reasons shown:
 - number 3 - firstly, because members feel it is unlikely, given the Covid-19 pandemic situation, that the events programme proposed by the Friends of Wisbech Bandstand would be able to take place this year; secondly, the Friends seem to have in place an existing mechanism for raising sufficient funding to deliver an entertainment programme (as demonstrated last year); thirdly, the Town Council is already supporting financially the Friends' entertainment programme by allowing use of Wisbech Town Council's Premises Licence (thus avoiding the need for the Friends to obtain (and meet the cost of) a Temporary Event Notice for each occasion); fourthly, the Friends have always rejected Wisbech Town Council's offer/request to work collaboratively in terms of delivering an entertainment programme at Wisbech Bandstand and have not given credit to the council for the support that it gave to last year's programme;
 - number 7 – when deciding to withdraw the grant funding to meet the cost of operating the Information Point from its previous location (i.e. a premises on Alexandra Road), the Town Council had offered to accommodate, free-of-charge, the Tourist Information Point at Wisbech Castle; however, WISARD decided to reject that offer and “go it alone”. Given that situation, members can see no reason why the Town Council should now meet the costs of operating the Tourist Information Point from a retail business in the town;
 - number 8 – given that the application had been submitted in October of last year, the members are unclear as to whether the situation described at that time still applies; also, the Town Council had, within recent weeks, provided grant funding of £1,000 to this group;
- (5) it be a condition of any grant funding awarded that recognition is given in any literature/publicity produced by the recipient organisation to the financial support that it had received from Wisbech Town Council; in addition, the recipient organisation shall provide to Wisbech Town Council, at the end of the specific grant-funded project or at the end of the financial year if the grant relates to the organisation's running costs, a brief report on the manner in which the grant provided by Wisbech Town Council had been applied;
- (6) allocation of the special grants budget for the financial year 2020/21 be as set out in the table below:



	Organisation/body	Funding allocation (£)
1.	Angles Theatre	1,000
2.	Citizens' Advice	1,000
3.	Wisbech and Fenland Museum	20,000
4.	Museum – Town Library	1,000
5.	Vivien Fire Engine Trust	500
6.	Wisbech in Bloom	3,500
7.	Waterlees in Bloom	500
8.	Wisbech Christmas Fayre	1,500
9.	Wisbech Reads	1,000
10.	The Cambridgeshire Shrievally Trust (The Bobby Scheme)	1,000
	TOTAL	31,000

- (7) the allocation of special grant funding to the Wisbech and Fenland Museum (at 3 in the table above) be committed for not only for the financial year 2020/21 but also the financial years 2021/22 and 2022/23 and that the Service Level Agreement between Wisbech Town Council and the Wisbech and Fenland Museum in relation to such financial support be extended to the period 31 March 2023;
- (8) it be noted that that, because of the “virtual” decision of this committee on 14 April 2020 to award £1,000 to 50 Backpacks (to help support financially the organisation’s response to the Covid-19 pandemic), in addition to the allocations in the table above, £4,000 of the special grants budget remains available for allocation for the financial year 2020/21;
- (9) it be noted that, further to minute R5/19, the Manager of the Angles Theatre had been in the process of arranging a visit by members to the theatre in the “run-up” to the grant allocations process; however, this has not happened because of the Covid-19 pandemic situation and the consequent Government guidance regarding social distancing and gatherings; members are keen for such a visit to take place when deemed safe to do so;
- (10) although not required for the financial year 2020/21 (because of the cancellation of events as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic situation), special grant funding for Wisbech Rose Fair and Armed Forces Day be re-introduced in the financial year 2021/22; also, the level of such funding made available to the Wisbech in Bloom team (reduced this year because of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic upon the team’s work) would revert back to £5,000 with effect from that financial year.

Councillor Oliver declared his non-pecuniary interest in small grant application number 7, by virtue of his being a Director of WisARD)

Meeting finished at 9.20 pm

Signed.....

Dated.....