



## RESOURCES COMMITTEE

13 JANUARY 2025 – 7.30 pm

### MINUTES OF MEETING

**Present:** Councillor Human, Chairman; Councillors Foice-Beard, Hoy, Imafidon and Wallwork.

**Apologies:** Councillors Meekins and Tierney.

**Public Participation:** None requested.

The minutes of the meeting of the Resources Committee held on 9 December 2024 were confirmed and signed.

#### **R20/24 Wisbech Town Council's accounts 2024/25**

The Clerk (and RFO) reported to members on the council's financial position as at the end of the third quarter of the financial year 2024/25; he gave explanations as to variations between the estimated income and expenditure for that period and the actual financial position as at 31 December 2024.

As at 31 December 2024, the council had received 103% approximately of the estimated annual income and had incurred 81% approximately of its estimated annual expenditure based upon the figures set out in the council's revenue budget for the financial year 2024/25. In addition, the council had incurred expenditure (totalling £74,955) from its ear-marked reserves in respect of election fees (minute R26/23 refers), Christmas lighting, maintenance works to Wisbech Castle, the purchase of equipment for Wisbech Park Pavilion and highway works associated with the Market Place enhancement scheme.

Members' attention was drawn, by the Clerk (and RFO), to the fact that income from market trading would not, based upon the situation as at the end of quarter three of the current financial year, achieve the level shown in the council's 2024/25 budget.

The Clerk (and RFO) responded to members' questions.

Members decided that

- (1) the information reported by the Clerk (and RFO) be noted;
- (2) the accounts for the third quarter of the financial year 2024/25 be approved and that, in accordance with minute R3/19, a copy of the report presented by the Clerk (and RFO) be signed by the Chairman;
- (3) the bank reconciliation (covering the period from the commencement of the financial year 2024/25 to the end of the third quarter of that financial year) be signed by the Chairman;
- (4) with the aim of generating additional bank interest for the council, the Clerk (and RFO) would investigate options for investing £50,000 of the money which had been loaned to Wisbech Town Council by Cambridgeshire County Council for works to Wisbech Castle (which is currently an ear-marked reserve of £110,093).



## **R21/24 Financial support 2024/25**

Members considered an application from a local group/organisation for financial support from Wisbech Town Council for the financial year 2024/25.

The Clerk (and RFO) reminded members that Wisbech Town Council's budget for the financial year 2024/25 (agreed at minute 86/23) includes a sum of £19,000 for financial support and that consequent to the decisions at minutes 88/23, 99/23 and R27/23, R7/24, R11/24 and R17/24, £4,480 remained available to fund organisations/groups' projects in the financial year 2024/25.

Members were reminded by the Clerk (and RFO) that this committee had decided (at minute R10/23) that, with effect from the financial year 2024/25, there would no longer be "automatic" financial support payments to groups and organisations; any group or organisation seeking financial support from Wisbech Town Council would need to make an application for such support. Some of the activities which had received "automatic" special grants funding up to and including the financial year 2023/24 – i.e. the Wisbech and Fenland Museum, Wisbech in Bloom, Waterlees in Bloom and the Wisbech Christmas Fayre – now have their own allocations within the council's overall budget.

The Clerk (and RFO) also reminded members that this committee had agreed that applications for financial support from Wisbech Town Council should relate to funding required to deliver specific projects/services/activities; not to contribute towards the organisation's general operational costs (such as heating, lighting etc).

The Clerk (and RFO) presented to members a summary of one application that had been received by the council since minute R17/24 for funding from the 2024/25 financial support budget, as set out below.

	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Purpose of financial support</b>	<b>Amount requested</b>
1.	Evolution Health and Wellness Centre CIC	The cost of purchasing 5 folding tables and 20 folding chairs, to make it possible for this Community Interest Company to deliver three specific monthly educational workshops (i.e., nutrition; health and wellness; stress management) for the benefit of the local community	£1,000 (total project cost)
	<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>£1,000</b>

The Clerk (and RFO) had provided members with a copy of the application form in advance of the meeting.

Members were reminded by the Clerk (and RFO) that the council's guidance to applicants for financial support 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. The guidance makes it clear that applications submitted should relate to funding required to deliver specific projects/services/activities; not to contribute towards the group or organisation's general operational costs (such as heating, lighting etc).

The Clerk (and RFO) reminded members that it is a condition of any financial support provided by Wisbech Town Council that recognition is given in any literature/publicity produced by the recipient group or organisation to the financial support that it had received from the council; in addition, the recipient group or organisation is required to provide to Wisbech Town Council, at the end of the specific project, a brief report on the manner in which the financial support provided by Wisbech Town Council had been applied.

Members decided that

- (1) the information reported by the Clerk (and RFO) in relation to the application considered at this meeting be noted;
- (2) the sum of £300 be awarded in relation to application number 1;
- (3) it be noted that, consequent to the decision at (2) above, the remaining balance of the council's financial support budget for the financial year 2024/25 is £4,180.

### **R22/24 Budget 2025/26**

Further to minute R18/24, members considered a draft budget, which had been circulated by the Clerk (and Responsible Financial Officer (RFO)) in advance of the meeting, for the financial year 2025/26, for recommendation to 20 January 2025 meeting of Wisbech Town Council.

The Clerk (and RFO) reminded members that the Parish Precept is the amount required by a Town/Parish Council of the households within the parish/town to meet any difference between income and expenditure in a financial year; i.e. to "balance the books".

At minute R18/24 members had considered an initial draft budget for the financial year 2024/25, produced by the Clerk (and RFO), which had required a 0% increase in the Band D equivalent Parish Precept. This committee had decided at minute R18/24 to make no changes to that budget, which proposed total expenditure of £521,760, requiring a Precept of £412,060 for the financial year 2025/26.

Consequently, this committee decided to RECOMMEND that budget to 20 January 2025 meeting of Wisbech Town Council for consideration/approval.

The Clerk (and RFO) reminded members that, in reaching that decision (at minute R18/24), the committee had been mindful that

- the initial draft budget for the financial year 2025/26 required an increase in the 2024/25 Precept of £407,110 (by £4,950) to £412,060 for the financial year 2025/26
- a total Precept of £412,060 equates to the Precept for a Band D equivalent property of £61.80 for the financial year 2025/26; an annual increase by £0.14 of the 2024/25 figure (of £61.66)
- an increase of £0.14 in the Precept paid by a Band D equivalent property (based on there being 6,667 such properties in Wisbech for 2025/26) (the number for the current financial year is 6,602) would equate to a 0% increase in the Wisbech Town Council Precept for 2025/26
- more than 50% of properties in Wisbech are in Council Tax Band A; those households pay 6/9 of the Band D equivalent Council Tax/Precept.



Members were informed by the Clerk (and RFO) that Fenland District Council (as the Council Tax billing authority) had informed Wisbech Town Council, since the time of minute R18/24, that, because of the District Council reviewing the Council Taxbase forecasts for each parish in Fenland, Wisbech Town Council's net taxbase (Band D equivalent dwellings) for 2025/26 had been amended to 6,694 (the previous number, reported at minute R18/24, had been 6,667; meaning an increase of 27 Band D equivalent properties).

The Clerk (and RFO) informed members that if the council were to divide the £412,060 proposed Precept for 2025/26 between 6,694 properties (instead of 6,667 properties), it would result in a Band D equivalent Precept of £61.55 (compared to £61.66 in the current year and £61.80 proposed, at minute R18/24, for 2025/26). Alternatively, the council could, if it were to retain its Band D equivalent Precept at the 2024/25 figure (of £61.66), generate an additional £692.00 (£412,752 - £412,060). Or the council could, if it were to continue to proceed with the £61.80 proposed Band D equivalent Precept, generate an additional £1,629.00 (£413,689 - £412,060). Either of the three options would show a 0% increase in the Precept for Band D equivalent properties.

The Clerk (and RFO) responded to members' questions.

Councillor Hoy proposed the following changes to the draft budget which had been approved at minute R18/24:

- a) being mindful of the Markets income position as at the end of quarter three of the current financial year (as noted at minute R20/24), reduce the estimated Markets income (from £26,000) to £24,000
- b) reduce the financial provision for Financial Support (from £14,000) to £12,000
- c) reduce the financial provision for Wisbech in Bloom (from £5,000) to £3,500
- d) increase the Staff Costs Contingency (from £14,000) to £15,500.

The Clerk (and RFO) commented that revision of the draft budget in the manner now suggested by Councillor Hoy would result in total expenditure of £519,760, requiring a Precept of £412,060 for the financial year 2025/26. The Band D equivalent Precept (when dividing £412,060 by 6,694) would be £61.55; an annual reduction of £0.11 (the 2024/25 figure being £61.66).

There was discussion regarding the additional staffing requirements of the council and whether the deficit in staffing resource would be best met through the direct employment of a part-time member of staff or "buying-in" resource as and when necessary. The Clerk (and RFO) gave his opinions as to the advantages and disadvantages of both options.

Members decided, unanimously, that

- (1) the information presented by the Clerk (and RFO) be noted;
- (2) it be RECOMMENDED to 20 January 2025 meeting of Wisbech Town Council that the draft budget for the financial year 2025/26 - which shows total expenditure of £519,760, requiring a Precept of £412,060 for that financial year (equating to £61.55 for a Band D equivalent property) - be approved;
- (3) the Clerk (and RFO) be delegated the authority, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Chairman of the Resources Committee, to put in place appropriate arrangements for additional staffing, within the funding provided by way of the Staff Costs Contingency element of the budget 2025/26;
- (4) the Clerk (and RFO) be congratulated on producing a budget for the financial year 2025/26 which enables the council to continue to deliver its services in a cost-effective, efficient and



effective manner, whilst requiring the Council Taxpayers of the town to pay no more, in fact less, money to Wisbech Town Council.

### **R23/24 Storage of council assets**

Further to minute R19/24, the Clerk updated members in relation to putting in place suitable arrangements for the purchase or rental of a facility for the storage of assets that are used in association with the delivery of the council's annual programme of community events and festivals.

The Clerk (and RFO) reminded members that this committee had decided at minute R19/24 that

- (1) officers be delegated the authority to put in place arrangements for the storage of council assets, either a permanent arrangement (such as the procurement of an additional storage container) or a temporary arrangement (renting a storage facility from a commercial business) until such time as a permanent one could be achieved;
- (2) the sum of £2,000 be allocated for this purpose; to be met from the Market Place Promotion budget (of £3,000) for the financial year 2024/25, from which there had been no spending.

Since the time of minute R19/24 officers had obtained costs from a number of suppliers for the purchase of a storage container and are seeking quotations for the siting of such a unit on council-owned land. The Clerk (and RFO) shared with members the costs of purchasing a storage container. In addition, officers had become aware today of the availability of a "for hire" storage facility in Wisbech, which the Clerk (and RFO) had arranged to inspect tomorrow.

The Clerk pointed-out that the purchase of a storage container would be a one-off cost, whereas the rental of a storage container would incur on-going revenue costs.

In discussing the options available to achieve suitable storage facilities for the council, members concluded that they wish to pursue the rental, rather than purchase, of a storage facility.

Members decided that

- (1) the information reported by the Clerk (and RFO) be noted;
- (2) if the Clerk feels tomorrow that the "for hire" unit would meet the council's storage requirements and the rental cost is, in his opinion, reasonable, he would, following consultation (by e-mail) with the members of this committee, arrange the council's hire of the facility.

### **R24/24 Community events and festivals 2025/26**

Members considered the production of a programme of community events and festivals for 2025/26.

The Clerk reminded members that the setting of an annual programme of community events and festivals had previously been undertaken by the Community Events and Festivals Committee. However, the Council had decided, at minute 42/24, that the committee be disbanded. In approving revised Terms of Reference for the council's committees (at minute 57/24), the responsibilities of the Community Events and Festivals Committee had been transferred to the Resources Committee.

Members were reminded by the Clerk (and RFO) that the draft budget for 2025/26 Events expenditure and income had been increased to £70,000 (from £50,000) and £10,000 (from £7,000) respectively (minute R22/24 refers).



Members decided that

(1) Wisbech Town Council would deliver the following community events and festivals in 2025/26:

- Wisbech Rose Fair on 28 June 2025
- WisBEACH Rock Festival on 3 August 2025
- Christmas Lights Switch-on event on 30 November 2025
- a Wisbech Unsung Heroes Awards ceremony on an appropriate date in January 2026; nominations to be sought in late 2025;

(2) the Community Events and Festivals Working Party would deal with the operational aspects of delivering the events at (1) above;

(3) the council would continue to support, as appropriate, other community events within Wisbech, such as Armed Forces Day, Wisbech Bandstand concerts and the Wisbech Christmas Fayre.

### **R25/24 Christmas lighting in Wisbech**

Further to minute R12/24 – at which this committee awarded a contract for these works - members considered whether there had been any issues in relation to delivery of the Christmas Lighting Installation Contract 2024 and putting in place such contractual arrangements for future years.

The Clerk commented that all the work covered by the contract, plus some additional works requested of the contractor during the installation period, had been undertaken successfully by the contractor within the agreed timescale. Those works had included additional lighting on Market Street, the central area of the Market Place and the Freedom Bridge roundabout.

Members were informed by the Clerk that there had been very regular liaison between the contractor and him during the installation works in terms of problem-solving and progress monitoring.

Members were informed by the Clerk that there had been a “walk-around” of the town’s lighting display – involving Councillor Hoy, the contractor and him – on 2 January 2025 to identify any “lessons learned” from the 2024 installation and to forward-plan for 2025. A schedule of actions had been produced as a result; one of those actions is for the council to seek to achieve the installation of an electricity supply in locations where generators are used currently.

The Clerk mentioned that removal of all the Christmas lighting had been undertaken by the contractor between 6 and 9 January 2025; far earlier than the contract requirement of 27 January 2025.

The Clerk informed members that there had been no circumstances which had required the council to consider implementing the penalty clauses contained within the contract. In fact, in his opinion, the contractor had gone “above and beyond” the requirements of the contract.

Members commented that they had been very impressed with the quality and timeliness of the work which had been undertaken by the new contractor.

The Clerk mentioned that, as a result of purchasing new lighting for South Brink – to replace that which had not worked last year (because it had reached the end of its life) - the council’s ear-marked reserve for the purchase of new Christmas lighting is now spent.



Members decided, unanimously, on the proposal of Councillor Human, seconded by Councillor Wallwork, that the current contractor be awarded a Christmas Lighting Installation Contract for the years 2025, 2026 and 2027, on the same terms and conditions as the 2024 contract, except that the council, instead of the contractor, would meet the cost of fuel for the electricity generators (if the council were unable to achieve, prior to lighting installation in 2025, the installation of an electricity supply in the locations where generators are currently used).

(Members resolved to exclude the public for this item of business on the grounds that it involved the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972)

**Meeting finished at 8.30 pm**

Signed.....

Dated.....