



WISBECH TOWN COUNCIL
RESOURCES COMMITTEE
29 NOVEMBER 2021 – 7.30 pm
MINUTES OF MEETING

Present: Councillor Oliver, Chairman; Councillors Hoy, Lynn and Tierney.

Apologies: Councillors Hill, Tibbs and Wallwork.

Public Participation: None requested.

The minutes of the meeting of the Resources Committee held on 12 October 2021 were confirmed and signed.

R10/21 Budget 2022/23

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 2022/23.

In presenting his report to members, the Clerk (and RFO) drew members' attention to several matters relevant to the setting of a budget (and Parish Precept) for the financial year 2022/23 (which he had taken into account in the preparation of the draft budget), including:

- when setting a budget, it is always better to over-estimate expenditure and under-estimate income
- the figures proposed for Business Rates and utilities costs for all council buildings and land are based upon this year's actual costs plus allowing for an "inflationary" increase for the financial year 2022/23. The same rationale had been applied to the costs of cleansing the Market Place, the Town Hall and those public toilets which are currently owned/managed by Wisbech Town Council
- to reflect the council's ambition to "take-on" the operation of the public toilets at the Horsefair Shopping Centre, the draft budget includes estimated income and expenditure in that regard
- the fact that the current pay award "deal" for local government employees came to an end on 31 March 2021. Although no agreement has yet been reached in terms of a pay settlement for April 2021 onwards, it is prudent to assume an increase in staff salaries with effect from 1 April 2021. The Clerk has assumed, for the purpose of budget production, an increase of 3% over the financial years 2021/22 and 2022/23
- in the light of the recent resignation of the holder of the post of Customer Services and Liaison Officer, the Clerk (and RFO) had discussed with the Chairman of the Staffing and Communications Committee and the Leader of the Council the filling of this vacancy. The conclusion reached is that the role should be re-designed (with additional responsibilities) before recruitment takes place. It had been concluded also that a job evaluation exercise of all posts, not simply the one to be re-designed, ought to be undertaken. Consequently, a sum had been included in the budget to cover the potential costs
- with regard to Wisbech Castle, it had been possible to increase the estimated annual income and reduce the estimated expenditure. The income situation is helped considerably by having both a commercial and residential tenant at Wisbech Castle
- the fact that Wisbech Town Council has a stated ambition to make its programme of community events and festivals bigger and better each year; it is not possible to achieve such an ambition



without making available the necessary financial resources. All the Events budget for the current financial year had been spent on delivering the WisBEACH Rock Festival; the remainder of the community events and festivals programme for the current financial year is being funded (as agreed at minute R8/21) from the Community Support budget. Therefore, the draft budget for 2022/23 shows an increase in the Events budget and a consequent reduction in the Community Support budget

- the Clerk continues to achieve reductions in the council's insurance premiums (from around £12,000 per annum in the financial year 2013/14 to less than £6,000 in the current financial year). The council's current three years "deal" expires in April 2022 but the Clerk (and RFO) is hopeful of negotiating a premium which is no more than the current one plus an "inflationary" increase of 3%
- the draft budget figures for other items of expenditure (such as General Administration, Duty/Legal, LHI schemes, Training, Elections and Grants) for the financial year 2022/23 are generally unchanged from the 2021/22 provisions.

Members were reminded by the Clerk (and RFO) that the Parish Precept, which is collected by the District Council as part of the annual Council Tax, 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".

The Clerk (and RFO) informed members that

- the current (2021/22) Precept of Wisbech Town Council is £368,885; with a Council Tax Base of 6,427 (i.e. Band D equivalent properties in Wisbech), this equates to £57.40 for a Band D property
- the council's ear-marked reserves as at the end of the beginning of 2021/22 were:
 - £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)
 - £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)
 - £133,193 for works to Wisbech Castle (the current balance of the £150,000 loan which had been provided by Cambridgeshire County Council in 2018)
 - £20,000 for additional Christmas lighting (allocated in the 2020/21 budget but not spent)
 - £30,000 for specialist advice in relation to the council's Anti-incinerator campaign
 - £10,000 as match funding towards the cost of a new community building at Wisbech Park
 - £2,500 as match funding towards the cost of a water play facility at Wisbech Park.
- at the beginning of the financial year 2020/21 the council possessed approximately £150,000 in general reserves (in addition to the ear-marked ones listed above). There will be a need to use a proportion of those reserves – in addition to the money which has been allocated by the County Council and the Combined Authority plus the two ear-marked reserves above – to assure the delivery of the Market Place enhancement scheme.

NOTE: 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. Based upon the council's estimated gross expenditure for the financial year 2022/23, the minimum recommended level of general reserves for this council would be around £116,000.



- the initial draft budget that he had produced for the financial year 2022/23 requires an increase in the 2021/22 Precept of £368,885 (by £20,755) to £389,640 for the financial year 2022/23. This equates to the Precept for a Band D property of £59.91 for the financial year 2022/23; an annual increase by £2.51 of the 2021/22 figure (of £57.40)
- an increase of £2.51 in the Precept paid by a Band D equivalent property (based on there being 6,504 such properties in Wisbech for 2022/23 (the number for the current financial year is 6,427)) would equate to a 4.37% increase in the Wisbech Town Council Precept for 2022/23
- it is worth noting that more than 50% of properties in Wisbech are in Council Tax Band A and, consequently, those households pay 6/9 of the Band D equivalent Council Tax/Precept
- in his opinion, the council should aim to set a budget for the financial year 2022/23 which does not require using general reserves to meet any shortfall between income and expenditure.

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

Members expressed the opinion that the Clerk (and RFO) had produced an excellent budget, which he had presented to members very well. The Chairman commented that it is good to know that the council is able to continue to do more for the people of the town, whilst not "hurting the pockets" of the Council Taxpayers in Wisbech.

Members made no changes to the draft budget which had been produced by the Clerk (and RFO).

Members decided, unanimously, that

- (1) the information presented by the Clerk (and RFO) be noted;
- (2) the initial draft budget, produced by the Clerk (and RFO) for the financial year 2022/23 (which shows total expenditure of £464,690), requiring a Precept of £389,640 for that financial year, be approved;
- (3) this matter be considered further, in the light of any factors which may require changes to the council's financial planning, at 10 January 2022 meeting of this committee; at that meeting a recommendation on a final budget (and Precept) for the financial year 2022/23 would be made to 24 January 2022 meeting of Wisbech Town Council;
- (4) the Clerk (and RFO) be congratulated on producing an initial draft budget for the financial year 2022/23 which enables the council to continue to deliver (and expand) its services in a cost-effective, efficient and effective manner but requiring the Council Taxpayers of the town to pay little more to Wisbech Town Council.

R11/21 Grants and financial support 2021/22

Further to minute R9/21, members considered additional applications for financial support from Wisbech Town Council.

The Clerk reminded members that Wisbech Town Council's budget for 2021/22 (agreed at minute 60/20) includes a sum of £7,000 for small grants and that, given that a total of £6,134 of that budget had been allocated previously (minutes R5/21 and R9/21 refer), £866 remains in the small grants budget. Further to minute R5/21, £4,350 remains in the special grants budget (of £36,000)

The Clerk had forwarded to members, in advance of the meeting, the grant application forms and letters of request that had been submitted to Wisbech Town Council since minute R9/21; summarised as set out below.



	Organisation	Purpose of grant	Amount requested
1.	Queen Mary Centre	Contribution towards the costs of delivering a Festive Food Share Multi-Cultural Event on 4 December 2021	£500 (the full cost of the programme is £2,678 (including the value of “in-kind” funding))
2.	Alexandra Road Bowls Club at the Wisbech Conservative Club	Contribution towards the cost of improving the bowls green	£1,000 (the full cost of the works is £1,500)
3.	Girls Venture Corps Air Cadets, Wisbech	Contribution towards the cost of purchasing new uniforms for cadets and officers	£500 (the full cost of the project is £1,000)

Members were reminded by the Clerk (and RFO) 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 decided that

- (1) the details of these three small grant applications, as explained by the Clerk, be noted;
- (2) small grant application number 1 be not supported, as they consider that, given the small number of people that the organisers of the event expect to attend, the event would have very minimal impact upon improving community cohesion in Wisbech;
- (3) small grant application number 2 be not supported, as they do not consider that it would be appropriate to provide financial support to a private members' club;
- (4) small grant application number 3 (£500) be approved;

(Councillor Oliver declared his non-pecuniary interest in the small grant application submitted by the Girls Venture Corps Air Cadets, Wisbech by virtue of his Chairmanship of the group's Civil Committee)

Meeting finished at 8.05 pm

Signed.....

Dated.....