



Minutes of the Meeting of the Finance Committee Held on Wednesday 26th November 2014 at 8.00pm In the Community Office

Present:

Councillors:

Tim Horton
Ian Hill
Roddy Orr
Tony Williamson

Officer:

Kristina Tynan

40/14 Apologies for absence
Robin Wilson.

41/14 Chairman's Remarks

TH thanked the Clerk for all her work in the last few weeks on the financial information needed for this meeting and assessing where we are in relation to end of year projections and looking at the requests from committees for next year's budget.

42/14 To approve the Minutes from the Meeting on the 20th May 2014 which were received by Council on 10/6/2014

Resolved: That these minutes were agreed as a correct record and that they were signed by the Chairman.

43/14 Matters Arising

- a) **Recreation Ground signs** – to note that this will be part of the Infrastructure funding application.
- b) **Watlington Fund** – TH stated that this would be better focused as a Town Hall Charity Trust Body and has been referred to them.

44/14 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest notified.

45/14 Budget/Reserves

a) **Pavilion Accounts** – NB had been asked to be in attendance but was unable to be present this evening.

Discussion took place on the issue of the PSFC starting up a sinking fund and it was agreed that we ask them to discuss this.

b) **Budget Update 2014/2015**

TH reported that KT had prepared an updated budget and that he and KT have run through several drafts of the projections on this year's spending and also on next year's budget. In doing this they

had taken at least some account of all the wishes expressed in committees and by Members in the recent period.

They also sought to make allocations on 'wish' lists (especially from Operations Committee) between expenditures falling this year or next year. Unexpected expenditure had been reconciled with some anticipated 'underspending/efficiency' in 2014/15. For example, spending on tree and hedge work and a prospective allocation for a 'tree review' into early 'winter work' had been split between the two financial years –while making all effort to see key work commencing as soon as possible.

The Pavilion account and this is subject to special review as can be arranged – but some extra money was placed in estimates for cleaning. Details on the Neighbourhood Plan have not been reviewed save to say that there is an expectation that reserves will meet to all anticipated costs.

There are several pieces of good news. First the Watlington Trustees have shown yet greater generosity by allocating an additional £2000 for the skateboard ½ pipe work.

Reviewing the current year we note that Actual expenditure (to 20th October 2014 and 'guestimated' end of year figures (a revised set of budget targets) show much higher costs through items such as the skateboard repair, the car park order, trench repairs in the car park, additional tree and hedge maintenance, bollard replacement, the new boiler in the Community Office. There has been a reduction in income from the West Room and Community Office. But we have benefitted from grants this year and we have had some savings on energy and water – though the full effect of the changes made is not yet fully revealed.

If we hold by the new proposals we should not incur any end of year deficit despite the addition of some items as stated above.

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL: That the updated budget for 2014/15 be accepted.

c) Initial Budget for 2015/2016

TH stated that we have the prospect of a net addition to the monies from SODC being an addition of about £2000 if there is no change in the Precept. This is because the tax base for Watlington has increased from 1115.6 to 1142.9. There will however be a reduction in the Council Tax grant scheme that will be 15.5% in South Oxfordshire for 2015/16 which will be a loss of some £600 for Watlington.

If the draft budget were accepted it might be seen that Council might require an increase in precept of some £6000-£7000. But with the provisional draft but only some £3,310 would be required through an actual rise in the Band levels A-H. (This would have the effect of an increase of say 3-4% to Council Tax payers)

Proposals for items in the 2015/2016 provisional draft Budget are in summary:

- Increase in green space maintenance
- Election costs of £500 (£1000 are already held in earmarked reserves)
- Operations Contingency of £3000
- No allocations for new staffing
- No new allocations to the NP.
- £1000 for a Cleaner for the Pavilion (to be match funded)
- Town Hall grant of £7,000

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL; That the attached provisional draft budget for 2015/2016 be noted and that Council are asked to approve a full budget for next year and a recommended precept/Band D Council tax at its meeting on January 13th 2015

d) **Allotment Reserve** – TH reported that year after year any surplus made from the Allotment rents has been put into general reserves and thought it would a good idea to start up an earmarked reserve for the allotments which can then be increased year on year. After discussion it was agreed that we put £300 into an allotment earmarked reserve as at the 31/3/2014.

e) **Any other budget/reserve items** – None were discussed.

46/14 External Audit Report – this was attached to agenda

TH reported on having an excellent report from the External Auditor and they raised no matters to be discussed.

Resolved: That this report be accepted.

47/14 Staff Issues

1. **Report on Staff Reviews.** - This was dealt with by the Strategy Committee and a group of Councillors of DT, IH, TH, BW, TW and the Clerk to be involved as necessary will be meeting to review this. There is no immediate urgency on this issue but a steady progress is needed. The next Staff Reviews will take place around March 2015 and these will be conducted by IH and TH

2. **Extra Staff** – This will also be considered by the group named above.

47/14 Other Financial Issues

a). **Development of funding for depreciation of Assets/Reserves** – TH stated that we need to look at all WPC properties. Agreed that this item needs to be kept on the agenda.

b) **Financial Regulations Review** – Last year's regulations was attached to the agenda.

A number of points were made and it was agreed that IH produce a highlighted version showing changes that need to be made. This will be discussed at the next meeting. TH stated that OALC have given useful information on this in their last two newsletters.

c) **Youth Club** - TH reported that he and IH have had a meeting with Roger Beattie and Carole Martin from the Youth Club Management Committee and they have now submitted a detailed letter and a set of accounts. TH suggested that we do not deal with it tonight but will discuss it at our next meeting. There are issues also to discuss with the current set up of the committee at the present time.

d) **Car Park Contributions** – KT reported that these are coming in well.

e) **BACS payments**- Discussion took place on this issue.

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL: That Council commence a BACS system in April 2014 and that our Financial Regulations be adapted to allow for BACS payment with a procedure for doing this.

48/14 General Issues

a) **Police office in Community Office** – An email has been sent to Inspector Mark Harling on this and we await his response.

b) **Review of Cuxham Field** –end of current lease.TH stated that WiB did have an interest in this land for an Orchard but are no longer interested in this field. Discussion took place on the fact that the lease has now ended.

Resolved: That we notify the person who holds the current lease that it has now run out and that Council need to address this matter. In the meantime it was agreed to have an interim agreement to run until October 2015.

During this time it was agreed to explore the idea of putting this into the hands of a Land Agent. TH/KT will look into this and will bring information back to this committee hopefully in January.

c) **Tree Audit** – RB had sent a note from the Operations Committee for the Finance Committee to discuss which stated:

'Operations Committee has in recent months given much time and consideration to the management of the trees within Parish Council control. The Committee now requests that the Finance Committee makes funding available to action 'Option 2' of the attached proposals from Martin Gammie of Consulting with Trees for 'Duty of Care Report and Tree Management Proposals

in Relation to Watlington Parish Council Tree stock'. The amount of the quotation is £1855. This represents an expenditure beyond the committee's current approved budget.

Further we request that you authorise that Operations may engage Mr Gammie for this work without going through the normal tender process due to his very particular local knowledge and skills.

In addition to his high level of professional qualifications, Mr Gammie was for many years Forestry Officer at SODC and, in that capacity and due to his long-term local residency, he has an unrivaled knowledge of the Watlington tree stock. This knowledge will eliminate the familiarisation process which another suitably qualified person would need to undertake, leading to savings in time and cost. His interest in and concern for Watlington's trees is well-known and his knowledge of SODC procedures should also ensure a smooth passage of any required works to trees within the conservation area or on protected trees. Mr Gammie was responsible for setting up the Tree Warden scheme within South Oxfordshire, for the recruitment and training of our Tree Wardens and is actively involved with the Trees & Design Action Group, which promotes the role of urban trees throughout the United Kingdom.

Since he has now departed his post at SODC the availability of his services to Watlington Parish Council is considered an exceptional opportunity - sufficient to warrant this request to circumvent the normal tendering process. This request only applies to the current proposal - any contracts for tree works recommended in the survey will be treated in the normal way within our financial regulations. Operations Committee has no reason to consider that the quotation is in any way unreasonable'

This issue was discussed and the following Recommendation was agreed:

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL: That under clause 11.1(c) in our current Financial Regulations that we all Martin Gammie of Consulting with trees to be appointed to do a 'Duty of Care Report and Tree Management proposals in relation to Watlington Parish Councils Tree Stock' as he has an exceptional local knowledge and skill which no other contractor would have.

49/14 Correspondence

1. SSE – new contract information – attached – **Noted**.
2. SODC – Calculation of Public toilet grant for 2014/2015- **Noted**

50/14 Items for Next Meeting.

Budget 2015 and Precept
Land Agent for Cuxham Field.
Police Office
Financial Regulations
Funding for Depreciation of Assets

51/14 Any Other Business

A meeting in January, before the Full Council will be need so a recommendation on the budget and precept can be given to the January Full Council meeting. The date will be emailed to members.

THERE BEING NO OTHER BUSINESS THE MEETING CLOSED AT 10.15PM

See attached Budget Update for 2014/2015 Provisional Draft Budget for 2015/2015