

**MARLBOROUGH TOWN COUNCIL
FINANCE & POLICY COMMITTEE**

Minutes of a meeting of the **Finance & Policy Committee** which was held on **Monday, 2 December 2019**
in the **Council Chamber, Town Hall, Marlborough** at 8 pm

PRESENT: Councillor A. Ross Chairman
Councillor M. Hall Town Mayor
Councillor N. Fogg
Councillor A. Kirk Wilson
Councillor M. Cooper
Councillor S. Price
Councillor A. Wilson

ALSO PRESENT: Mrs S. Parker Town Clerk
Mrs D. Whitehall Administrator
Mr N. Goodwin Marlborough.News

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions.

372/19 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence. **Cllr. Fogg** asked to be excused from the meeting around 9pm to honour another commitment.

373/19 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations.

374/19 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor had recently handed over two grant cheques as awarded at the last Finance & Policy meeting. One was for £760 to the St John's Close Residents Association for equipment, trees and plants for the Community Garden and the other for £957 to Home Start Kennet. A letter of thanks had been received from this charity stressing that the grant would allow it to continue to offer a valuable service of home visiting volunteers to support local families.

375/19 MINUTES

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting held 23 September 2019 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman

376/19 TOWN CLERK'S REPORT

The Town Clerk's report was noted.

377/19 COMMITTEE BUDGETS 2019/20

Members noted the committee income and expenditure reports to end October 2019 (Month 7) and a list of payments.

Budgets were running as expected and there was very little to highlight. The £13,000 budget line for the annual storage, erection, removal and maintenance of the Christmas lights was discussed. Members noted that in other towns, traders made contributions towards these costs. The funds to purchase the lights had been raised by subscription

more than 10 years ago and it may be necessary to ask for contributions when the lights needed to be replaced (or leased) in the future.

378/19

EXTERNAL AUDIT

Members noted the External Audit report for 2017/18 and that a Notice of Conclusion of Audit had been posted on the Town Council's website as required under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. It was noted too that a minor error relating to attributing the repayment of the public works loan to the wrong box on the AGAR form had been brought to the Council's attention. **Cllr. Ross**, the **Town Clerk**, the **Office Manager** and all involved were congratulated on once again achieving a clean bill of health with their careful accounting practices.

379/19

DEVOLUTION OF SERVICES

Members noted the Town Clerk's update report and considered how progress on the town's journey towards devolution could be best communicated to local communities. Discussion points included:

- Valuable lessons could be learned from Chippenham Town Council's experience with devolution in terms of both the process and how to communicate effectively with residents
- Open, transparent and honest communications would be important
- A recognition that if the Town Council chose not to take on devolved services, they would simply stop as Wiltshire Council would no longer provide them. The aim must be to take on the services and do them better, offering better value to residents
- Whether to set up a working party to take the lead in identifying priorities for negotiations and preparing a strategy
- Whether a dedicated Customer Services/Marketing/PR role was required (in house or outsourced)
- Clear signage/branding on vehicles, assets (e.g. litter bins) and uniforms
- For a small team, Marlborough Town Council had a lot to be proud of in terms of projects and services delivered which should be given more visibility
- An ear marked reserve of £46,000 had been set aside for devolution in 2020/21 to aid with preparation and communication
- The town's population was 8-9,000, but the town's amenities (shops, doctors, schools, cemeteries, play areas, etc) were used by people in surrounding villages who did not contribute via the precept
- Whether to ask Chippenham Town Council to share its Communications Strategy
- Whether to produce a Marlborough Town Council standalone digital and print newsletter
- Devolution discussions would begin with WC in May 2020
- Whether budget allocations should be made for the 2020/21 financial year or in 2021/22
- To ascertain whether there was any conflict of interest for Cllr Fogg due to his dual role as a Town and Wiltshire Councillor

RESOLVED: (i) to allocate budget for the devolved services in the 2021/22 financial year

RESOLVED: (ii) promotion and communication should begin in 2020/21, calling on ear marked reserves as necessary

RESOLVED: (iii) to form a Working Party comprising **Cllrs. Hall, Ross, Cooper** and the **Town Clerk** to work with Wiltshire Council in the lead up to the negotiations starting in May 2020 with support as necessary from **Cllrs. Fogg** and **Price** and with regular updates at

both F&P and Full Town Council meetings. A new Working Party should then be appointed in the next Municipal Year (2020/21)

380/19

RETENTION POLICY

Members noted the Town Clerk's report and considered whether to amend the Retention Policy to include advice about the handling and retention of emails.

RESOLVED: to delegate to the Town Clerk to draft an amendment to the Retention Policy to including guidance on the handling and retention of emails, to be approved at a future Full Town Council meeting

381/19

BUDGET AND PRECEPT SETTING 2019/20

Members noted a report from the Town Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) and considered the draft budget for the Finance & Policy Committee together with the recommended draft budgets from the Property, Amenities & Open Spaces (A&OS) and Planning Committees as well as the Staffing Sub-Committee. They also considered whether an additional meeting would be required in order to finalise recommendations on budgets and a precept figure to Full Town Council on 20 January 2020. (*Confirmation of the tax base for Marlborough had not yet been confirmed by Wiltshire Council which had created a delay*)

The **Chairman** proposed that Members should hold an additional meeting to meet the timetable for submission to Full Town Council.

RESOLVED: (i) to meet as a Working Party on 6 January 2020 with an additional Finance & Policy Committee on 13 January to agree final proposals for Full Town Council on 20 January 2020

The **Chairman** reminded Members that Marlborough featured on the list of the 60 councils with the highest local council tax (precept) at Band D, although significantly lower than most towns listed and other nearby Wiltshire towns (of which six were higher). It was also noted that those with the highest precepts across the country were those that had taken on the services of their principal councils.

Cllr. Price asked what the year-on-year precept increase figures had been and the **Town Clerk** agreed to circulate a response.

Members considered a schedule of savings prepared by the Town Clerk offering an overall budget reduction of £73,687 and discussed the possibilities for further savings. Main discussion points were:

- Whether there were any projects where a Public Works Loan could be used to help spread the cost over a number of years
- Whether projects qualified for CIL money, e.g. new cemetery
- Whether any items could be deferred to future years
- Whether to cancel additional CCTV spend, or ask for contributions towards the cost
- Whether there were opportunities to increase revenue from assets, e.g. venue hire
- Whether savings could be made against ongoing overheads e.g. energy, office supplies

Cllr. Fogg left the meeting

RESOLVED: (ii) to agree the suggested savings of £73,687 and update the draft budget to accommodate this and circulate updated budget sheets in readiness for the Working Party meeting on 6 January 2020

The meeting closed at 9.25 pm

Signed:
Chairman

Date: