

Marlborough Town Council



Finance and Policy Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance and Policy Committee held Monday, 25 November 2024 in the Council Chamber, Marlborough Town Hall at 7pm

PRESENT	Councillor Caroline Thomas	Chair
	Councillor Nicholas Fogg	
	Councillor Andrew Ross	
	Councillor Mervyn Hall	
	Councillor James Sheppard	
	Councillor Kelvyn Shantry	
	Councillor Caroline Sadler	
	Richard Spencer-Williams	Town Clerk
	Dawn Whitehall	Corporate Services Officer
	Charlotte Hitchmough	Action for the River Kennet

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions.

291/24 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from **the Town Mayor, Councillor Cleasby. Councillor Fogg** would have to leave the meeting at 8:15.

292/24 DECLARATIONS

Councillor Shantry – agenda item 6 (grants) – non-pecuniary interest.

293/24 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.

294/24 MINUTES

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting held 28 October 2024 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chair

295/24 ACTION LOG

Members noted the updated action log. Comments included:

#247 – the report on which Council services could be chargeable would be helpful as input to the February Committee meeting.

#259 – action closed – the Amenities & Open Spaces Committee had already met to set its budget and so the Chair had not followed up to inform the A&OS Chair of the target % increase cap for the 2025-26 budget submission.

296/24 GRANTS

Charlotte Hitchmough, Director of Action for the River Kennet, described a proposed dashboard that would bring all information about water levels and flooding risk together in one place as an online “Flood and Drought Dashboard”, which it was proposed would be available as a link from the Town Council website. It was good news that the original estimated costs for this project had come down, and so the request for £1,000 was now amended to £500.

RESOLVED: to award £500 to Action for the River Kennet towards the development and hosting of a flood and drought dashboard

ACTION: encourage grant applications for the remaining 2024-25 budget via the Town Council online channels for consideration at the next Committee meeting

297/24 INTERNAL AUDIT

Members considered the first interim internal audit report for 2024-25 and the auditor’s recommendations (R):

- The auditor concluded that no issues were arising from his work to date
- R1 – the Town Clerk confirmed that the Council would review its financial regulations in the light of recent NALC (National Association of Local Councils) advice.
- R2 – authorised Members would be asked to initial authorisation sheets in future to confirm they have inspected the relevant invoices.
ACTION: arrange for initials to be added to past sheets
- R3 – the Council would consider having its VAT de-minimis calculation performed.
ACTION: the Town Clerk and Chair to meet to identify a provider to perform a VAT de-minimis calculation before the financial year end, and to allocate associated budget for this specialist service

RESOLVED: that the first interim internal audit report for 2024-25 was noted

298/24 PROPOSAL CLARIFICATION

At Full Council (*4 November, Min. No. 266/24*) members had considered the recommendation made by the Finance & Policy Committee at its meeting on 28th October 2024, that all requests for new budget for the forthcoming financial year must be formally considered and agreed by the relevant committee and submitted to the Finance and Policy Committee budgetary meeting (typically in November); and for this process to be ratified by Full Council as a principle to be adopted for 2025-26 and future financial years. At Full Council, Members had not been clear on what they were agreeing to, believing the proposal set out what was already agreed practice and **RESOLVED:** to revise and clarify the proposal at a future meeting of the Finance & Policy Committee. Discussion points included:

- Although broadly agreeing that this was already standard practice, the Chair noted that in the previous year there had been two items for F&P to consider that had not been fully costed and/or had not been through a formal committee review: this had presented difficulties for F&P Members when considering the overall budget. The proposal had been put forward to prevent this happening in future.
- Meetings were scheduled so that Committees could consider budgets prior to the November F&P meeting to review and recommend a budget to Full Council in December. This should ensure that new budget proposals (whether projects, events or services) should have accompanying narrative and costs.
- The timing, being only seven months into the financial year, was acknowledged as very early for Committees to be asked to consider future years' priorities and projects, however there was very little flexibility in this as the Town Council was required to submit its precept to Wiltshire Council early in January: in 2025 this is 19 January (date can vary)
- The original recommendation to Full Council had been intended for 'new' budget items only; the proposal was now reconsidered to encompass the entire budgeting process
- **Clr Hall** noted that the Property Committee budget had been agreed at its meeting on 22 October, which was before the F&P meeting on 28 October when a % increase cap had been agreed to be recommended to Committees. Members then discussed
 - whether meeting timetables should be adjusted to allow for F&P to meet to consider whether to set budget parameters prior to Committees meeting to agree budget requirements
 - whether an announcement should be made at Full Council in the summer to specify the process
 - whether all Committee Chairs should be members of F&P
 - whether Committee Chairs should be asked to attend F&P meetings where budgetary parameters were to be set
 - whether the Chair of F&P should attend all Committee meetings where appropriate
- A proposal that all Committee Chairs should be members of F&P was discussed but subsequently withdrawn
- Members noted that currently only one Committee Chair was not a member of F&P
- Whether training should be put in place to help new Councillors fully understand the process and requirements when proposing new budget items.
- Two changes to the wording of the original proposal were agreed

RESOLVED: that all requests for proposed budgets for the forthcoming financial year must be formally considered and agreed by the relevant committee and submitted to the Finance and Policy Committee budgetary meeting held in November; and for this process to be ratified by Full Council as a principle to be adopted for 2025-26 and future financial years

299/24 BUDGET

Members considered the Committee and Council budget requirements for 2025-26 for recommendation to Full Council.

Before Members considered the draft budget **Councillor Ross** raised concerns about whether there was enough resilience in the budget and about the presentation of the accounts, e.g. general reserves. Members noted that as this was not on the agenda, and with no data available it was difficult to discuss the topic. Important matters should be raised in advance so they could appear on the agenda with background information provided to allow discussion. The **Chair** noted a recent satisfactory interim internal audit report; it was agreed that **Councillors Ross, Thomas the Town Clerk and Office Manager** should meet to discuss his concerns in detail with an agenda item added to the next Committee meeting.

ACTION: arrange a meeting between Councillors Ross, Thomas, the Town Clerk and Office Manager, and add an agenda item to the next meeting

RESOLVED: items of importance requiring decisions should be presented to Members via agenda items allowing the Chair and Members the opportunity to hold a full discussion

Councillor Fogg left the meeting

Discussion points included:

- At the last meeting Members agreed that any rise to the precept should be kept below 5%. The proposed budget currently showed a rise of 5.78%
- No bank interest was shown in the budget for 2025-26: several figures were suggested, with £6,000 agreed upon
- Members agreed that election costs should be funded by a combination of precept and ear marked reserves
- Members agreed the website upgrade should be funded from general reserves
- Members raised property rental income. Councillor Ross left the room during this discussion. An adjustment to the property income budget line was agreed, and Councillor Ross returned to the room
- Members were satisfied that the changes agreed would reduce the overall precept required for 2025-26

RESOLVED: to rework the budget with two adjustments, and to recommend the budget to Full Council for adoption for 2025-26

The meeting closed at 8.50 pm

Signed:

Date:

Chair