

Sandy Town Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Policy, Finance and Resources Committee of Sandy Town Council which was held at 10 Cambridge Road, Sandy on Monday 10 January 2022 commencing at 7.30pm.

Present: Cllrs N Aldis, P Blaine, A Gibson, J Hewitt, M Hill, R Lock, C Osborne (Chair), M Pettitt, P Sharman and S Sutton.

In attendance: Mr C Robson (Town Clerk)

	<i>Actions</i>
1 Apologies for absence (98-2021/22)	
Apologies had been received from Cllr Scott.	
2 Declarations of interest (99-2021/22)	
There were none.	
3 Minutes of previous meeting (100-2021/22)	
It was RESOLVED to receive the minutes of the Policy, Finance and Resources Committee held on 22 November 2021 and to approve them as a correct record of proceedings.	
4 Public Participation Session (101-2021/22)	
There were no questions from members of the public.	
5 Financial Reports (102-2021/22)	
i) Members considered a balance sheet and detailed financial report showing income and expenditure against the revenue budget for December 2021. The Chairman took Members through the report page by page.	
The Clerk commented that the stewardship grant received towards the Riddy was due to end in 2022. However, the Administration Team Leader had organised for an extension to allow the Council to receive a grant from the scheme again in 2022/23. The offer of an extension is due to come through shortly and will need signing and returning within 10 working days. This means it may not be able to come back to the meeting for approval. Members were happy that the Full Council meeting on 24 th January look to give delegated authority to the Chairman of the committee and/or Clerk to sign the extension agreement. It is hoped a new grant funding scheme will become available in the next 12 months to replace the scheme that is ending.	
The Chairman commented that a number of reconciliation reports had been included in the hard copy of the agenda by mistake. However, the documents are useful to see as they are what the Chairman uses to check and sign off on reconciliations after each meeting.	
It was agreed to note the balance sheet and financial reports.	

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ii) Members received a budget overview report for December 2021. The Chairman took Members through the report page by page.

It was agreed to note the report.

iii) Members scrutinised a schedule of payments made since the previous meeting. A Member queried a payment to Verto and the Clerk explained that this company managed the Council's websites and payment was related to the service and licences.

A Member asked which vehicle the MOT paid for covered. The Clerk did not know at the time of the meeting. *For the purpose of Members information it can be confirmed that the MOT was for vehicle AK12 WLJ.*

Cllr Osborne

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the list of December 2021 payments.

iv) It was **RESOLVED** that the Chair of Policy, Finance and Resources check and approve the bank reconciliations and statements.

6 **Grant Applications (103-2021/22)**

It was noted that no grant applications had been received.

7 **Replacement Work Truck (104-2021/22)**

Members noted that a demonstration of the proposed new Etesia electric truck had been arranged for 26th January 2022. A time was to be agreed and Members would be advised by email.

8 **Beeston Track Repair (105-2021/22)**

Members considered the repair work to a track at Beeston Village Green. Members agreed that the work carried out by the recommended contractor in the past had been to a good standard and as such supported the recommendation.

RESOLVED to approve repair works to a track crossing Beeston Village Green at a cost of £3,400 plus VAT by the recommended contractor. That the Clerk liaise with the developer of properties at 18 The Green to ascertain if a contribution to the repair works could be obtained.

9 **Play Gates Repair Quote (106-2021/22)**

Members received and considered a report providing quotations on the replacement of gates for play parks. The Clerk confirmed that the recommendation was for the purchase of gates, with installation to be carried out by the Council's outdoor team.

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RESOLVED to approve the purchase of three self close pedestrian gates from Company C.

10 Electricity Supplier (107-2021/22)

Members received and noted a report from the Clerk on electricity and gas costs and their impact on the 2022/23 budget. Members thanked the Administration Team Leader for the work done in securing a new contract at lower rates than originally planned for, allowing a reduction in the draft 2022/23 costs and budget.

11 2022/23 Draft Budget and Precept (108-2021/22)

- i) Members received a report on budget increases and decreases within the current draft 2022/23 budget.

The Clerk explained that an additional £2,500 (est.) would need to come from the Council's Rolling Capital Fund to 'top-up' the Neighbourhood Plan budget to £10,000 as previously agreed.

The Chairman took Members through each page of the report and details of budgets the Council had increased and those it had decreased.

A Member queried the 3% allowed for in the salary budget as some other authorities had not allowed this much. The Chairman commented that the advice came from the Council's accountant, who was also an advisor/accountant to the National Association of Local Councils. Members felt it was important to take the advice provided.

Members noted that the areas where increases to budgets were made were largely out of the Council's control. The main increases come from salary increases in line with NALC contracts and utility cost increases.

Members noted the report, which was to be kept in mind when reviewing the proposed 2022/23 budget and precept.

- ii) Members received and considered the 2022/23 draft budget and precept with a view to agreeing a recommendation to Full Council.

The Chairman introduced the budget summary and detailed report. Members had previously reviewed and amended the report on three other occasions as part of the budget review process. Members noted that the current proposed budget required an increase of £28,764 in funding, resulting in a 3.77% increase per band d equivalent.

A Member proposed that the Council use underspend from the current

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financial year to offset the budget increase in 2022/23 and reduce the percentage increase per band d equivalent. It was proposed and seconded that £10,670 be used from any underspend towards the 2022/23 revenue budget, lowering the amount required in budget increase to £18,094 and a resulting Precept Band D Equivalent increase of 2%.

The Chairman commented that an underspend can only be used once and would potentially lead to a bigger increase in the following year as the council would need to account for the shortfall which the underspend was used to fund and any other annual increases that might be required in that year. It was also noted that any underspend would usually be allocated to the Council's Rolling Capital Fund, strengthening that fund and allowing the Council to do more. Reducing that capital fund by approx. £10,000 would leave the Council with less funds to carry out capital expenditure as identified in the previous report. This could include a contribution from the Council to the new skatepark if it becomes needed. The funds also need to be available to cover unexpected/planned works, such as happened with the repair of the Church wall and Chapel roof in the current financial year. It was also noted that underspend is only estimated and with three months to go could change.

A Councillor commented that it would be noticeable that STC's increase was a larger percentage than CBC and the Police and Fire increase. It should be looked at critically to see if there is a way to avoid this. Members commented that looking at the percentage increase and not the real monetary increase is misleading. Sandy Town Council's increase is minimal when compared to CBCs. A Member commented that it was not helpful to compare Councils, who have completely different structures, assets, income streams and services.

A number of Members stated that they would not support using uncertain underspend to reduce the budget. It was commented that if the Council wishes to reduce its precept it should look at those services it can cut, not use underspend which will result in additional pressure on the revenue budget in the 2023/24 budget setting. The Council could reduce its budget and precept by cutting Christmas lights, events or tree planting if Members don't feel these are things residents want.

The Chairman reminded Members that they could go through the budgets again to see what expenditure Councillors might want to cut, but that that process had been completed a number of times over the last few months with nothing raised to date.

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A Member commented that he would defend the spending of money within the budget and that it must be realised that while other towns precept income has grown as a result of more housing development, this is not the case in Sandy. The tax base has remained static and as such an increase becomes necessary to address inflation increases the Council is seeing in things such as utilities. The increases in the budget are largely down to utilitaires and contract costs which the Council must pay.

It was commented that the increase proposed would still leave Sandy with one of the lower precepts and average Band d Equivalent compared to other towns in Central Bedfordshire.

The proposal to reduce the Band D Equivalent to a 2% increase by using 2021/22 underspend to support the 2022/23 revenue budget was put to the vote and was not carried.

It was proposed, seconded and **RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that 2022/23 budget and precept as set out in the papers submitted to the committee be recommend to the Full Council for approval. The proposed budget will require an increase in the budget of £28,764, resulting in a total precept of £628,120. This will result in a Precept per Band D Equivalent of £154.86, which will be a £5.62 (3.77%) increase per Band D Equivalent for the financial year 2022/23.

12 Deed of Easement (109-2021/22)

Members received and considered the signing of a deed of easement over Beeston Village Green.

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the signing of the deed of easement by the Clerk subject to ongoing discussions with the applicant over contributions towards the enhancement of the Village Green.

13 2022/23 Meeting Calendar (110-2021/22)

Members received and considered a 2022/23 meeting calendar.

Members **RESOLVED** to approve the calendar subject to the following amendments;

Cancel meetings on 28th November 2022 to allow the Chamber to be used for the Christmas lights event.

Admin

Move the CSE committee meeting from 28th November 2022 to 27th November 2022.

Move the DS Committee meeting from 28th November 2022 to 5th December 2022, with the HR committee to follow it at 7:30pm.

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Delete Bank Holiday on 30th May 2022, which has been moved to June 2022.

14 Health and Safety Procurement Policy (111-2021/22)

Members reviewed the Council's adopted health and safety procurement policy.

It was **RESOLVED** to agree the Council's adopted health and safety procurement policy.

15 Employee Handbook (112-2021/22)

Members noted that the Human Resources committee has completed the review of the policies within the Employee handbook in conjunction with the Council's Human Resources Advisor.

16 Chairman's Items (113-2021/22)

There were no Chairman's items.

17 Date of Next Meeting (114-2021/22)

It was noted that the next Policy, Finance and Resources Committee meeting will be on Monday 21st February 2022.