



Meeting (No)

Time & Date

Place

Document

Finance & Administration Committee (3)

10am Tuesday 12th December 2023

Neston Town Hall

Minutes

Present: Cllrs S. Wastell (In the Chair), C. Braithwaite, J. Edwards and S. Hudspeth.

In attendance: Cllr T. Hardcastle, Z. Dean (Locum Chief Officer), T. Godfrey (Finance Manager/RFO).

PART 1: Items considered in the presence of the press and public

Since both the Chair and Vice Chair of this committee were absent, a vote was taken to elect a Chair before the meeting could proceed. Cllr Braitwaite nominated Cllr Edwards; Cllr Edwards refused to accept the nomination. Cllr Edwards nominated Cllr Wastell. Cllr Wastell was accepted as the Chairman for this meeting only.

19	Public Participation
	No members of the public were present.
20	Apologies for Absence
	Cllr Jones – unwell. Cllr Kynaston was absent from the meeting
21	Declarations of Interest
	None received.
22	Minutes of the Last Meeting
	RESOLVED: to accept the minutes from the meeting held on 12/09/23 as an accurate record of that meeting. The Chairman duly signed the minutes.
23	Committee Accounts up to Months 7
	The RFO explained the accounts to committee, noting that the proposed budget for F&A committee (24/25) was also contained within the same document. It was noted that inflation had been allowed for within the figures; the Mayor's Allowance had increased by £150 for 24/25. The IT budget included cloud storage, back-up, and Wi-Fi. The CIL fund has £5,000 going out for expenditure already committed. The internal auditor budget has increased for next year because the fee is based on the spending band classification of Neston Town Council. The overall F&A expenditure budget has increased by £5,000.
24	Finance
a	RESOLVED: to approve expenditure of £82,144.43 net from the Council's current account authorised by the RFO from 01/08/23 to 31/10/23, and Equals card payment of £863.93 net from 01.08.23 to 31/07/23.
b	RESOLVED: to note current account income of £9,966.37 net from 01/08/23 to 31/10/23
c	RESOLVED: to agree the reconciliation of the Council's three bank accounts to 31.07.23.
25	Budget Setting

Initial:

Date:

	<p>All committees had met in order to determine their required budgets for 2024/25. The RFO informed committee that the tax base figures had been requested from CW&C; these are expected to be received before Christmas. Currently, a Band D property at the projected 12.3% equates to an increase of £7.62 per household.</p> <p>C&E requests include marsh dredging and mosquito monitoring as well Christmas lighting. The current lights are believed to have a 5-year life span. Funds need to be built up in order to expand and improve Christmas lighting provision. Committee requested clarification on the age of the Council's Christmas lights.</p> <p>The C&E committee will hold a working group meeting in January for interested parties, in order to determine a way forward for the 24/25 Christmas season, fundraising, and switch on festivities. It was noted that this meeting may help inform the precept/Christmas lighting budget. A councillor pointed out that the public address system had not been effective for the 2023 switch-on event and requested that funds were allowed for this to be rectified for future events.</p> <p>Income in 24/25 is forecasted to reach £15,000.</p> <p>A councillor noted that inflation was at 6% with pension inflation set to reach 8.5% and asked whether the Council could justify the projected increase, which was higher than inflation.</p> <p>Members noted that last year the precept was increased by 24.7% and unforeseen costs had also been met during 2023/24.</p>
a	<p>It was RESOLVED: to accept the Finance & Administration's draft budget request for 2024/25 with the caveat that charges for previous public address system would be found and the budget increased accordingly.</p> <p>Recorded vote: 2: for, 1: abstention, 1: against.</p> <p>It was noted that this cost would usually be met by the Christmas event budget.</p>
b	<p>The notes from the informal budget aspirations – ranger post discussion, were received. The C&E committee is working through this aspiration, investigating the post and defining the job description. Committee understood that there is no money to establish this post at the current time. Further investigatory work is needed.</p>
c	<p>A suggestion from a councillor was to cut 10% off every line in the budget.</p> <p>An alternative viewpoint was to have a 2% efficiency reduction. Members understood that this would not be possible this year but could be considered in future years.</p> <p>It was RECOMMENDED: to propose a 12.3% precept increase as a baseline for 2024/25 to Full Council, pending public address system information and Council tax base figures.</p> <p>Recorded vote: 3: for, 1: against.</p> <p>Cllr Hardcastle left the meeting at this point.</p>
26	General Reserves Policy
a	<p>The RFO advised members that there is shortfall issue and Council cannot keep reducing the General Reserves fund without replenishing it. This follows guidance from The Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance Practitioners Guide (JPAG). The fund currently stands at £155,476.00. General Reserves are for unseen expenditure, e.g. an unfunded insurance claim. The Council does have EMRs that could be used to top up the fund. A councillor noted that the Town Council should meet its legal obligations. There is also no funding for the current year's pension strain cost (23/24), which would need to be paid out of General Reserves.</p> <p>It was RESOLVED: to accept the General Reserves Policy 2023/24.</p>

Initial:

Date:

b	It was RECOMMENDED: to increase the General Reserve fund over the next 3 years by increasing the precept (£11,600 per year, £35,000 total). This would increase the 2024/25 precept to 15.5%.
27	Pay Award 2023
	The Pay Award for 2023 was noted. The Locum Chief Officer confirmed that the increase in one day of annual leave entitlement for all staff was implemented from April 2023, as per last year's NJC agreement.
28	Breakdown of ICT Costs
	Committee noted that the ICT breakdown was useful and requested that the detailed reports continue for the next 3 months' worth of data up until the next meeting, for comparison, and to see value for money (August – October).
29	Rialtas 2024 Year End Schemes
	It was RESOLVED: to accept the three-year Gold package for Rialtas Year End Scheme for closedown and support.
30	Update on CW&C Asset Management Agreement
	Committee noted that a 2-year extension on the Asset Management Agreement was on the horizon. It was RESOLVED: to accept the update report.
31	Delivery Plan
a	Committee studied the document which highlighted the important areas of the Delivery Plan which fall within the remit of the Finance & Administration Committee.
b	It was RESOLVED: to focus on goals: 4, 13, 14 and the five-year Financial Plan element from Goal 12 (totalling 8 individual points), following the analysis framework Neston Town Council had already established for reviewing the progress of the plan. 1 x Abstention.
32	Date of Next Meeting
	It was noted that the next scheduled meeting would held be on 20/02/24 at 10am. Members thanked officers for their hard work, recognising the RFO's efforts in preparing the detailed budgetary information.

The meeting closed at 11.45am.

Signed _____ Date _____