

Minutes of the FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE of
Bridport Town Council held on Monday 16 January 2023 at 7.00pm.

PRESENT: Cllr: Sarah Williams (Chairman)

Cllrs: Geoffrey Ackerman Maggie Ray
 Karen Hunt Martin Ray
 Julian Jones (from 7.30pm) Anne Rickard
 Gill Massey

Also in attendance: Cllr Dave Rickard.

PUBLIC FORUM

There were no members of the public present.

48. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Rose Allwork.

49. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

50. MINUTES

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 14 November 2022 be confirmed as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

51. BEST VALUE AND SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting of the Sub Committee held on 6 December 2022 be received and adopted.

The Town Clerk advised that the West Bay Car Boot Fund Grants Panel would meet in early February 2023.

52. FINANCIAL ESTIMATES 2022/2023 – 3rd REVISION

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL:3774. The Finance & Office Manager summarised the position, including a significant reduction in balances as a consequence of project delivery in the current year, and other unforeseen expenses.

RECOMMEND: that the 3rd revision of the estimates for the year 2022/2023 be approved.

53. BUDGET AND ESTIMATES 2023/24

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 3775.

In considering this item, members noted:

- The position of the current year 2022/23 revenue budget estimates
- The position on the Town Council's finances held in reserves and proposed Capital Budget
- Use of Reserves
- The recommended revenue budget (estimates) for next year (2023/24) with a commentary on recommended significant variations from this year
- The recommended fees and charges for 2023/24
- Comments of the Budget Working Group
- Medium Term Financial Forecasts
- Carbon Budget
- Summary of Budget Considerations
- Options on the level of precept to fund the budget for 2023/24

The estimates and projects had been considered at the Best Value and Scrutiny Sub Committee and the Budget Working Group.

The Town Clerk highlighted the considerations for members, which included to:

- present a balanced budget
- cater for the impact of inflation on services, expenditure and income
- maintain and develop existing services provided by the Council
- maintain appropriate levels of reserves insofar as this is possible during the pandemic, and continue to earmark reserves to support project delivery, including a capital programme
- make provision for salary increases, including an estimated national pay award
- make provision to continue to deliver Town Council Plan projects
- provide continuing support for town events
- maintain grant funding for community projects and support of key organisations through service level agreements – Arts Centre, Museum, Leisure Centre, CAB, Youth & Community Centre, West Bay Discovery Centre, the Indoor Skate Park and the Literary & Scientific Institute
- through the delegated services budget, seek to make ongoing revenue provision to meet some of the costs of discretionary services that are likely not to be delivered by Dorset Council and that the Town Council may need to manage

The Town Clerk drew members' attention to the options on the precept and advised that whilst the officer recommendation was to set a balanced budget, it was open to members to consider any level of precept. The options put forward were:

- Option 1: increase the precept by £68,449. In total, this would raise £834,484 and provide a deficit budget (i.e. funded from general reserves) of £10,000.
- Option 2: increase the precept by £78,449. In total, this would raise £844,484 and provide a balanced budget.
- Option 3: increase the precept by £88,449. In total, this would raise £854,484 and provide a contribution of £10,000 to general reserves.

The current Band 'D' Town Council charge was £249.81, resulting in the following annual and weekly increases in Council Tax for a Band 'D' Council Tax Payer:-

<u>Annual</u>	<u>Weekly</u>	<u>Band 'D'</u>
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Option 1	£21.47	£0.42	8.60%
Option 2	£24.72	£0.48	9.90%
Option 3	£27.97	£0.54	11.20%

Members discussed the report in detail, including:

- The impact of the budget proposals and inflation on the level of Council Tax;
- The possible implications of the ongoing review of community governance;
- The contribution made to the budget proposals by a reduction in the level of councillors' allowances;
- The need for careful management of project priorities, given the pressures on reserves;
- An expected increase in energy costs;
- The calculation of the share of income from the Football Club Car Park paid to Bridport Football Club; and
- The challenge of achieving the external income targets set out in the Capital Programme.

Following consideration of the report, it was unanimously RECOMMENDED to Full Council:

- (a) that the draft estimates for 2023/24 be approved as set out in Appendix A.
- (b) that the proposed fees and charges for 2023/24 be approved as set out in Appendix B, with further discussions to take place in relation to certain elements, for consideration again if necessary, at the March meeting of this committee.
- (c) that the Medium Term Financial Plan be approved as a guide for future years as in Appendix C, noting that each year's budget will be subject to separate approval.
- (d) that the draft capital programme and proposed use of reserves for 2023/24 and future years, as set out in section 4 of the report and at Appendix D.
- (e) that in terms of the precept, Option 2 be approved, as set out above and in section 12 of the report, which would increase the precept to £844,484 with the annual Band 'D' charge increasing from £249.81 to £274.53, the increase being equivalent to 9.9% or 48p per week.

The Town Clerk and Finance & Office Manager were congratulated on the preparation of these figures, in what had been a difficult year.

A discussion followed regarding budget and precept planning for the new Town Council arrangements from April 2024.

Cllr Julian Jones joined the meeting at this point (7.30pm)

54. MEETINGS CALENDAR

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 3776, who thanked Claire Peters-Way for drafting the proposed meetings calendar for 2023/24.

RESOLVED: that the meetings calendar be approved as tabled.

55. ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL WELLBEING COMMITTEE

The Town Clerk reported that there were no recommendations from the meeting of the committee held on 11 January 2023.

56. REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERNAL AUDIT AND APPOINTMENT OF AN INTERNAL AUDITOR FOR 2023/24

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 3777, setting out the arrangements for internal audit, and recommending the retention of the existing auditor, Lightatouch Internal Audit Services.

RECOMMEND: that the existing internal audit arrangements continue for 2023/24.

57. RISK ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT: ANNUAL REVIEW

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 3778.

The report set out the Council's approach to risk management, and included a corporate risk assessment covering the major risks applying to the Council.

RECOMMEND: that the Corporate Risk Assessment, and the management strategy as noted in the report, be approved as tabled.

58. SERVICES ADMINISTERED BY THE TOWN SURVEYOR

The Town Surveyor reported on the following matters:

- Car Park pay and display machines and surfacing. Machines at the Council's car parks were in need of replacement and a further report would be provided, following discussions with Dorset Council about collaborative procurement. Options for resurfacing of Bridport FC Car Park were under consideration. Members asked that consideration be given to ensuring that machines accepted cash, and to external funding to assist with the cost of resurfacing.
- Old Dairy site. A proposed building on the site would be considered by the planning authority on 19 January 2023, and there would be discussions about options for use thereafter, prioritising Bridport Museum.
- Mountfield office moves. Town Council officers would shortly move to the ground floor, to overcome lone working issues following the relocation of Dorset Council's reception to the Library. A meeting room and additional tenancies on the first and second floor would be facilitated by this change.
- Changing Places Toilet. Prices had risen since government funding was agreed for this facility, and a further report would be provided to consider how the additional cost might be met.
- Public toilets at The Mound, West Bay. These had been closed in January 2023 by Dorset Council, for a minimum period of six months, to allow repair of the harbour wall. Discussions were ongoing about a location for temporary alternative toilets.

The Town Clerk reported on a proposal by Bridport Community Kitchen to install three emergency homeless pods in Bridport. Detailed arrangements had been discussed by the Council's Environment & Social Wellbeing Committee, and by Bridport Local

Area Partnership. A potential issue for the committee would be a request that Town Council land be considered as possible locations.

RESOLVED: that agreement of potential locations for emergency homeless pods be delegated to the Town Surveyor.

RESOLVED: that the report of the Town Surveyor be noted and that the thanks of the committee be recorded in respect of the hard work carried out.

59. REPORTS FROM OUTSIDE BODIES

Cllr Gill Massey reported on a very successful Wassail at the Community Orchard on Sunday 15 January 2023, which approximately 200 people attended and that the Friends of the Millennium Green Trust held a very successful twelfth night evening at the Town Hall on Friday 6 January 2023.

Cllr Dave Rickard updated members on the current arrangements at the Arts Centre and that their 50th anniversary would be celebrated in the Summer of 2023.

Members considered future arrangements for reporting by representatives to outside bodies, noting the small number of reports, and that non-committee members were less able to engage.

RESOLVED: that the Town Clerk should table a report to Full Council on possible future arrangements for reporting from outside bodies.

60. COMMUNICATIONS

The Town Clerk reported a letter from AScape, asking to repurpose a West Bay Car Boot sale grant. He advised that as the change was required before a formal opportunity to consider as an agenda item, the matter would be dealt with by the Chairman under delegation, subject to any informal indications from members.

Members indicated support for the repurposing of the grant.

The Town Clerk further reported that despite significant complexities, the solar car ports project was nearing completion.

61. PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS

The Finance & Office Manager presented Payments List 4 of the 2022/23 accounts, in the sum of £329,295.75, which had been authorised for payment since the last meeting.

RESOLVED: that List 4 of the 2022/23 accounts be approved and signed by the Chairman.

62. PUBLIC BODIES (ADMISSION TO MEETINGS) ACT 1960

RESOLVED: that in view of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted, it is advisable in the public interest that the public be temporarily excluded and they are instructed to withdraw.

63. STAFFING MATTERS

The Town Clerk reported on proposed current and future arrangements for the post of Town Surveyor.

RESOLVED: that the arrangements for the post of Town Surveyor be approved as proposed.

The meeting closed at **9.08pm**.

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 13 March 2023