



**MINUTES OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY
19TH JANUARY 2016 AT 6.00PM IN THE GUILDHALL BEWDLEY**

PRESENT

Councillor Mr J Beeson
Councillor Mrs Linda Candlin
Councillor Mrs C Edginton-White
Councillor Mr D Killingworth

In attendance:
Councillor Miss M Fishwick
Mr N Farress (Town Clerk)
Mr D Moore (Treasurer)

142 Apologies

Councillor Mr P Edmundson

143 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

144 Dispensations

The Town Clerk clarified that Councillors have a dispensation until May 2018 in relation to the setting of Council Tax.

145 Minutes

It was **agreed** that the minutes of the meeting of the Finance Committee held on 11th November 2015 be confirmed as a true and accurate record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

As a follow up to the Minutes, the Town Clerk presented some photographs of the equipment favoured by the Shaw Hedge Road TCC for the play area. Councillors felt that the costs of individual pieces of equipment seemed high, and that the skate park remained in poor repair.

AGREED

- (i) The £2000 allocated to Shaw Hedge Road play area remain in reserves;
- (ii) that Wyre Forest Community Housing be approached in relation to repairs to the skate park;
- (iii) that the TCC is asked what they see as the overall plan/objectives for the park as a whole;
- (iv) the District Councillor for the area should be approached to see if they are willing to contribute.

146 Budget 2016/17

The Council at its meeting on 4th January considered the draft budget put forward by this Committee but had made no recommendations for changes. However, it was recognised that the level of expenditure on various projects if implemented would lead to a deficit which would have to be made good either by use of reserves or by an increase in Council Tax or a combination of both.

The Committee considered again the issues raised by the Town Clerk in his report to Council.

A number of items were clarified such as the provision for election expenses, Wyre Hill play equipment and Christmas lights. The Town Clerk exposed a need for a five year business plan for the Council in order to capture the Council's longer term aspirations and likely levels of income required over the coming years. It was **agreed** that the Town Clerk give this some more consideration and put forward the proposal with support from this Committee to the Council in March.

It was also **agreed** that the Town Clerk looks into grant funding from Heritage Lottery, Awards for All and the War Memorials Trust to fund possible improvements/repairs to the Telford Bridge, Guildhall accessibility and the Wribbenhall war memorial. The feasibility of up lighting the St Anne's war memorial would also be looked into again.

A desire to resurrect the Bewdley in Bloom event (as part of Britain in Bloom) was discussed, along with replacing the blue plastic planters in Load Street as they were not considered in keeping. The Town Clerk mentioned that WFDC who the Council pay to provide the floral displays would be willing to theme the displays in Load Street and Jubilee Gardens in red, white and blue to tie in with the Queen's 90th Birthday celebrations. It was **agreed** to add £500 for new planters in the town centre and increase the floral budget by £500. It was also agreed to add an additional £500 to the Queen's 90th Birthday budget to potentially put on a "Royal Garden Party" in line with the national celebrations in June. There is a working group reporting to the Better Bewdley Advisory Committee currently looking into this.

In relation to the Christmas lights, a working group would be looking into the expansion of the scheme to the Wribbenhall side of the Bridge. It was also **agreed** that the old strings of lights can be disposed of and removed from the asset register.

Having agreed to the above provisions the overall deficit for next year as between income and expenditure would be £10430. As before a decision was required as to whether that should be funded by a reduction in reserves or by an increase in the precept and Council Tax or a combination of both.

The Treasurer advised that the present and anticipated level of reserves at the current year end would be around £90,500. Having regard to general guidance as to the level of reserves, it would be feasible to utilise the reserves to meet part of that shortfall. To fund that same figure in totality would otherwise require an increase of Council Tax of 11.3%.

Some discussion took place around the timing of any potential increase, but there was an acknowledgment that as principal authorities are looking to make savings, the Town Council would need to be ready to take on further service enhancements or transfers, and is indeed keen to work with partners to achieve this. It was also noted that plans to phase out central government funding via the RSG will have an impact on certainty, as councils will be relying on the levels of business rates that can be raised locally. This could have an impact on town and parish councils over the coming years. Overall it was felt that an increase was justifiable considering the enhanced role the Council is already playing in the town in providing locally managed and focussed services, and its aspirations to continue with this strategy in 2016/2017.

The Committee considered rises of 0%, 3.5% and 5% in the Council Tax figure, and being mindful of the need to protect tax payers from excessive rises decided on 3.5% being an appropriate rise. This would raise £3208 and require a use of reserves of £7222. This rise in real terms will cost the average council tax payer an additional £0.017 per week which was considered justifiable.

It was agreed to recommend Council that the budget as now drawn up should be approved and that the overall gap as between income and expenditure of £10430 should be funded by both use of reserves of £7222 and an increase in Council Tax of 3.5% to £26.61 per average Band D household.

147 Date and Time of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Finance Committee would be on Tuesday 16th February 2016 at 6.00pm

Close of meeting 8.15pm

Signed.....
Chairman of Finance Committee
16th February 2016