



FLEET TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

Monday 20th October 2021 at 7pm

PRESENT

Councillors: P Einchomb, R Fang, L. Holt (Chairman), B. Schofield, S. Tilley, G. Woods.

Also Present: Janet Stanton - Town Clerk
Mary Harris – Committee Clerk
Wendy Allen - Office Manager
Alex Robins - Harlington General Manager

PF October 2021 ITEM 1 APOLOGIES

Members received and accepted apologies for absence from Councillors Robinson and Kuntikanamata who had prior commitments.

PF October 2021 ITEM 2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

PF October 2021 ITEM 3 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from the public.

PF October 2021 ITEM 4 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Page 4, Item 9 - In response to a question Committee was advised that there having been no room in this Town Talk details of Grants would appear in the next issue. The minutes of the Policy and Finance Committee held on Monday 21st July 2021 were **APPROVED** and signed by the Chairman.

PF October 2021 ITEM 5 QUARTERLY FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT

Members considered the commentary of the Town Clerk with an overview of the financial performance July 2021 – September 2021, together with the reports below.

- a. Quarterly Report
- b. Harlington Monthly Performance totals April – August 2021
- c. 2021-22 projections & draft 22-23 budget spreadsheet
- d. Balance sheet as at 30th September 2021
- e. Budget detail by Centre as at 30th September 2021
- f. Ear marked reserves as at 30th September 2021
- g. Income and expenditure detail - September 2021
- h. Bank Reconciliation – 31st August 2021
- i. Cash Book – September 2021

- j. List of Receipts – September 2021
- k. List of Payments - September 2021
- l. List of Debtors
- m. Q2 2021 – 2022 VAT return

The following matters were raised and discussed:

- Following prudent management, ongoing furlough payments and the use of the Harlington as a Vaccination Centre the estimated budget shortfall for 2021-22 had reduced and was now estimated at £43,000.
- Officers were thanked for their work on reducing the projected deficit.
- Following confirmation that the live streaming equipment is up and running, Members questioned whether this could be made available for Council meetings, however it learnt that it would not be practicable to do this with the current equipment.
- Following discussion on the necessity/desirability for live streaming of Council meetings, (given the limited interest by members of the public during lockdown streaming), the Clerk was requested to seek costings for suitable filming and audio equipment in time for potential inclusion in the 2022-23 budget.
- **Cemetery**
 - Cemetery income continues to exceed budget for 2021/22. It is anticipated this will continue until the end of the financial year but cannot be assumed to continue into the following year.
 - Confirmation has been received that, Section 106 contributions from Hartland Village may be used to fund a cemetery extension.
- **Harlington**
 - Ticket Sales are increasing but primarily for the new year. An element of caution by customers is still noticeable, however sales are in line with the most recent projections.
 - The policy on refunds is clear and there has been no customer backlash in this regard.
 - It is recognised that reduced audience numbers have a knock-on effect particularly on bar and ice cream sales etc.
 - The App for bar orders is now in use and audiences are encouraged to use it.
 - When not in use the main auditorium at the Harlington is used as a Vaccination Clinic bringing in additional revenue.
 - It was confirmed that the planned live streaming equipment has come in on budget, at £15,000 bar some minor additions. The equipment is in use, can be hired on an hourly basis and is being offered as an additional incentive to attract band bookings etc.
 - The coffee shop remains closed.
 - Hall hire at Ancells Farm is holding up with most users returning.
 - The ongoing maintenance costs burden for the Ancells car park was discussed. Members thanked officers for reducing the Year End shortfall to £43,000 and thanked the Harlington General Manager for keeping to the £15,000 budget for streaming.
 - Members congratulated the Harlington Manager on his initiative in managing through a difficult time.

RESOLVED

1. To receive and accept into the minutes

- 5a. Quarterly Report
- 5b. Harlington Monthly Performance totals April – August 2021
- 5c. 2021-22 projections & draft 22-23 budget spreadsheet
- 5d. Balance sheet as at 30 September 2021

- 5e. Budget detail by Centre as at 30th September 2021
 - 5f. Ear marked reserves
 - 5g. Income and expenditure detail - September 2021
 - 5h. Bank Reconciliation – 31st August 2021
 - 5i. Cash Book – September 2021
 - 5j. List of Receipts – September 2021
 - 5k. List of Payments - September 2021
 - 5l. List of Debtors
 - 5m. Q2 2021 – 2022 VAT return
2. Councillor Robinson had previously confirmed that the bank reconciliation for August 2021 equals zero, the bank statements match the reconciliation, and that he has signed the bank statements and payment schedules.

PF October 2021 ITEM 6 RESERVES

Members considered:

- 5d. Balance sheet as at 30th September 2021
- 5f. Ear-marked reserves as at 30th September 2021

Members noted the predicted deficit going forward and the current use of Reserves.

Prior to the meeting a working group had considered the requirement for General Reserves and had concluded the need for an additional General Reserve of £360,000 based upon the impact of another pandemic causing total closure of the Harlington calculated on the basis £20,000 per month for a period of 18 months. It was noted that at the present time the Council's Reserves stand at £2,310,408, of which £2,020,099 is ring fenced to the Harlington Development Fund. It was suggested that until Council was in a position to set aside an additional £360,000 in General Reserves that the Harlington Reserves could be utilised to cover this requirement in the short term. There was extensive discussion on whether this strategy was likely to meet approval and it was agreed to refer the matter to Full Council.

The list of Ear-marked Reserves was considered for revision. The monies set aside for committed obligations included:

- Pension Obligations £30,000
- , Tennis Sinking Fund (agreement), £37,563
- Calthorpe Park Playground (contract) £20,009and
- the Sensory Garden (s106 money)
- Total £139,000

The remaining £151,000 currently allocated to Ear Marked Reserves would for the time-being be transferred into General Reserves. The Clerk advised that included in this was £10,000 for Website Development scheduled for use in the 2022-23 financial year.

RESOLVED

To recommend that Full Council consider in the light of budget setting for 2022-23

1. The creation of a General Reserve to cope with a future pandemic of £360,000
2. Amendment of the ear-marked Reserves List as detailed above
3. Inclusion of £10,000 into the list of committed obligations for website development

PF October 2021 ITEM 7 THE BUDGET

Members received and considered the proposed budget and explanatory budget notes. It was noted that the budget under consideration was a 'maintenance budget', No monies had been set aside for projects. It was suggested that with elections in 2022, new projects would be for the 'new' Council

to agree. It was agreed that the budget could not be resolved without first considering the Council's Precept request for 2022-23.

Currently the Tax Base for 2022-23 is not confirmed. However, based on the 2020/2021 tax base of 10560 it was noted that a Precept increase of:

- 13% would result in no requirement to draw on Reserves
- 4% (assessed as inflation) would require £93,607 from reserves
- 0% increase would require a £137,200.00 call on Reserves

In considering the Precept decision members were particularly concerned about the impact on residents. It was pointed out that any increase in monetary terms would be small, but the Council Tax statement would highlight the percentage increase. Some members felt that the coming year (given the difficulties and losses experienced due to the pandemic), would be an opportunity to engage the public with a 'one-off' larger increase, whilst other members wished to see no increase in the precept, leaving future decisions on projects and the way forward to a 'new' Council.

A wide variety of views and suggestions on the way forward were made and discussed. The effects on the predicted budget deficit of a range of percentage increases in precept from 0% to 15% were considered. Given the uncertainty with regard to the future of the Harlington / Civic Quarter project the wisdom of continuing to accumulate ear-marked reserves for the Harlington replacement was questioned, but reference was made to Council's commitment in 2016 to ring fence this reserve. It was suggested that past decisions to keep the Town Council's element of the council tax increase to 0% had placed the Council's operational budget under considerable strain. Between 2016/17 and 2021/22 Fleet Town Council's element of Council Tax had only increased by 2.5% per annum.

There was some consensus around a proposed percentage increase in line with inflation – say 4% however there were also members who were keen to delay any decision as long as possible citing the constantly changing pandemic / economic situation and the uncertainty around the Tax Base. Some members felt that a large increase might be acceptable if it could be linked to a tangible project, but the proposed increases were against a maintenance budget only

There being no vote taken or clear consensus of opinion it was

RESOLVED

To ask for direction from Full Council on the way forward, so that a formal recommendation from Policy and Finance Committee could be brought forward to the December Council Meeting. The following direction will be sought from Full Council's November meeting

1. The allocation of Reserves as listed under item 6,
2. The Precept increase between
 3. 0% increase but drawing down reserves
 4. 4% increase to reflect the cost of living, but still drawing on reserves or
 5. 13% which would deliver a balanced budget without reliance on reserves.

PF October 2021 ITEM 8

INVESTMENT REPORT

Members received and considered the quarterly investment report. The Clerk confirmed that the transfer of funds will take place via a cheque.

RESOLVED

To note the balances held in the Fleet Town Council Accounts and progress the transfer of £400,000 as agreed at the previous P&F meeting.

Members received the Internal Auditor's report for the 7th October 2021 visit and considered the actions required.

RESOLVED

To note receipt of the Internal Auditor's report and approve the Action Plan.

PF October 2021 ITEM 10

GRANTS

1. Members considered an application from 1st Crookham Scouts for a grant of £380 to enable them to put on a community Christmas event. After a brief discussion and further clarification from the Clerk the grant was **APPROVED**.
2. Members welcomed the report from Sacha's Project but asked to see further information on numbers of users and where they originated from. The Clerk was also asked to establish whether the project had received funding from other parishes. It was noted that the project is planning additional opening on Friday's and it is hoped FTC can facilitate this.

RESOLVED

- a. To approve the grant for £380 to 1st Crookham Scouts to stage an event within the annual Christmas Festival in Fleet.
- b. To note receipt of the 'record of grants awarded to date' which it was confirmed would be published in the next Town Talk
- c. To note a report from Sacha's Project and request additional information.

PF October 2021 ITEM 11

POLICIES

Further to the review timetable agreed at the meeting of the P&F Committee on 22nd May 2017, members received and reviewed the following policies:

- a. **Code of Conduct**
Members were advised that in the past FTC has resolved to adopt Hart DC's Code of Conduct. HDC's code has now been updated. Members acknowledged the sensible changes to the Code and in particular the focus on 'not bringing the Council into disrepute'. Members were heartened to hear that nationally representations are being made to government pointing out that without sanctions the Code has little value. Members **APPROVED** the updated Code of Conduct.
- b. **Complaints**
Members reviewed the Complaints Policy and suggested a small number of minor changes which were accepted. Members **APPROVED** the Complaints Policy.
- c. **Computer**
Members reviewed the Computer Policy and suggested a small number of minor changes which were accepted. Members **APPROVED** the Computer Policy.
- d. **Disciplinary**
Following a brief discussion regarding understanding of the word 'serious' members **APPROVED** the Disciplinary Policy
- e. **Equality and Diversity**
Members reviewed the Equality and Diversity Policy; they corrected a number of typos and removed all references to monitoring. Following this and the removal of the last two paragraphs the Equality and Diversity Policy was **APPROVED**.
- f. **Grievance**

Members reviewed the Grievance Policy and had some concerns regarding the understanding and place of mediation in the process. They were unable to resolve their concerns at the meeting.

Members agreed to bring the Grievance Policy back to the next P&F Committee meeting in February 2022.

g. Drugs and Alcohol

Members reviewed the Drugs and Alcohol Computer Policy and suggested a small number of minor changes which were accepted. Members **APPROVED** the Drugs and Alcohol Policy.

RESOLVED

1. Members agreed to approve the following policies with a review date of October 2024:
 - a. Code of Conduct
 - b. Complaints
 - c. Computer
 - d. Disciplinary
 - e. Equality and Diversity
2. To bring the following policies back for review to P&F Committee meeting on 16th February 2022:
 - Grievance

PF October 2021 ITEM 12 CLERKS REPORT

Members received and noted the report from the Town Clerk.

PF October 2021 ITEM 13 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Policy and Finance Committee will be held on Wednesday 16th February 2022 at 7pm at the Harlington.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 9.59pm.

Signed: **Date:**.....

Chairman