

Minutes of the **FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**
held at the Town Hall, Swanage on **WEDNESDAY,**
11th JANUARY 2023 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT:- Councillor T Foster (Town Mayor) – Chair

Councillor J Bishop
Councillor M Bonfield (to 2.30 p.m.)
Councillor C Moreton
Councillor C Tomes
Councillor W Trite
Councillor M Whitwam

Also in attendance: -

Councillor G Suttle
Councillor N Rogers

Dr M Ayres	Town Clerk
Miss A Spencer	Finance Manager
Ms G Percival	Assets & Compliance Manager
Mr C Milmer	Visitor Services and Business Development Manager

There was one member of the press present at the meeting.

1. **APOLOGIES**

An apology for her inability to attend the meeting was received from Councillor Harris.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were invited to declare their interests and consider any requests for Grants of Dispensations in accordance with Section 9 and Appendix B of the Council's Code of Conduct.

Agenda Item No. 3 (a) i – Councillor Bonfield declared a non-pecuniary interest in the scale of charges under the Code of Conduct by reason of being employed as a taxi driver and hiring a grid space in the boat park.

Agenda Item No. 3 (a) i – Councillors Bishop and Bonfield declared non-pecuniary interests in the scale of charges under the Code of Conduct by reason of being regular hirers of Town Council beach huts.

Agenda Item No. 3 (a) i. – Councillor Tomes declared a non-pecuniary interest in the scale of charges under the Code of Conduct by reason of close family members being private beach hut site licensees.

The dispensation granted to the eleven Councillors resident in Swanage to participate in setting the precept until May 2024 was also noted.

3. **BUDGET SETTING 2023/24 - TO REVIEW:**

(a) **Draft Estimates 2023/24**

The Town Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer introduced the Preliminary Budget Report 2023/24, which was the culmination of extensive work over recent months, on the part of officers and councillors, including participation in finance workshops and formal committee meetings.

i. **Scale of Fees and Charges 2023/24**

It was reported that further to the Finance & Governance Committee meeting held on 14th December 2022, officers had undertaken a further review of summer charges in the long stay car parks, the outcome of which had been presented to Members in the workshop held on 4th January 2023. Charges had been adjusted accordingly and were detailed in Appendix G to the report, along with all other charges.

The Town Mayor brought to the attention of the Committee a written representation penned by a local resident, titled 'Proposed Budget Amendments 2023/24' which had been e-mailed to most committee members earlier in the day. It was noted that the detailed budget had been formulated by councillors and officers over many weeks, including discussion at workshops and committee meetings. Attention was drawn to the fact that the topics raised in the submission had been considered in detail through this process and it was therefore concluded that there was no need to debate its content. It was agreed that the submission should be acknowledged and the local resident informed of the committee's decision.

Further to their declarations of interest in sections of the scale of charges under item 2) above, Councillors Bishop, Bonfield and Tomes left the meeting.

It was proposed by Councillor Trite, seconded by Councillor Moreton and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

TO RECOMMEND to the Estimates meeting on 16th January 2023:

That the Scale of Fees and Charges, Appendix G of the Preliminary Budget Report, be approved and adopted.

Councillors Bishop, Bonfield and Tomes re-entered the meeting.

ii. **Revenue Budgets 2023/24**

It was noted that the revenue budget was summarised in Appendix A of the Preliminary Budget Report and included the one-off expenditure listed in Appendix B. At the workshop on 4th January 2023, officers had been tasked with identifying savings and the Visitor Services Manager reported adjustments to budgets for which he was responsible that would have the effect of reducing total net expenditure by £9,750. An uplift of £2,220 in the likely budget requirement for RNLI lifeguard services was also noted (subject to confirmation of the RPI inflation figure for December 2022). Overall, these amendments to the draft budgets would reduce the projected deficit on the general fund for the year by £7,530. Members thanked officers for bringing forward these proposals.

It was proposed by Councillor Bonfield, seconded by Councillor Bishop and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

TO RECOMMEND to the Estimates meeting on 16th January 2023:

That the draft revenue budget 2023/24, Appendix A & B of the Preliminary Budget Report, incorporating the amendments outlined above, be approved and adopted.

iii. **Capital Programme 2023/24**

Consideration was given to the draft Capital Programme 2023/24 to 2025/26, set out in Appendix D to the Preliminary Budget Report.

It was proposed by the Councillor Whitwam, seconded by Councillor Tomes and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

TO RECOMMEND to the Estimates meeting on 16th January 2023:

That the draft Capital Programme 2023/24, Appendix D of the Preliminary Budget Report, be approved and adopted.

iv. **Precept 2023/24**

Consideration was given to the level of precept for 2023/24. Two options had been incorporated in Section 6 of the Preliminary Budget Report: an increase in precept of 2.98% and a freeze in household bills. It was noted that the draft budget included the first of these options.

It was reported that the tax base had increased by 1.08%, meaning that a freeze in household council tax bills would result in an uplift of £9,030 in precept. An increase of 2.98% would result in an increase of £25,000 on the precept and an increase in household bills of 1.88%, £3.24 for the year. It was noted that these options, together with a range of other potential precept levels were set out in Appendix F of the Preliminary Budget Report.

Members acknowledged the impact that inflation would have on the council's planned expenditure, but also recognised the financial struggles that many residents were now facing, particularly through household inflation and the cost of food. The impact that any increase in the precept could have on households, although small, was noted. Further to paragraph 6.4 of the Preliminary Budget Report, the use of reserves to support the revenue budgets and lessen the financial impact on residents during the current economic downturn was also considered.

Following further discussion, it was proposed by Councillor Trite, seconded by Councillor Tomes and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

TO RECOMMEND to the Estimates meeting on 16th January 2023:

That the Council approves a precept of £849,030 for the 2023/24 financial year, equivalent to a Band D bill of £172.01, a freeze on the current year's charge.

Councillor Bonfield left the meeting at 2.30 p.m.

(b) **Draft Treasury Management and Investment Strategy Statement 2023/24**

The Finance Manager presented the draft Treasury Management and Investment Strategy Statement 2023/24 (TMISS). The continued impact of external economic factors was highlighted.

It was noted that the updated tables contained a 3-year forecast for investment levels (reserves) and these were forecast to drop to £2.58m by the end of year 3, as a result of the council's capital expenditure plans.

The council's borrowing and investment strategy was noted as remaining unchanged from the current year. However, it was further noted that this statement would be reviewed should the assumptions upon which the strategy statement was based radically change.

It was proposed by Councillor Tomes, seconded by Councillor Bishop, and
RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

TO RECOMMEND to the Estimates meeting on
16th January 2023:

That the revised draft Treasury Management and
Investment Strategy Statement 2023/24

(incorporating any changes to reserve levels
resulting from recommendations made in this
meeting) be approved and adopted.

4. **ITEMS OF INFORMATION AND MATTERS FOR FORTHCOMING AGENDAS**

No items of information or matters for forthcoming agendas were raised.

5. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting was noted as Wednesday 22nd February 2023 at
9.30 a.m.

The meeting closed at 2.40 p.m.
