

**Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee
held remotely on Monday 14 December 2020 at 6.30pm**

Present: Cllr Corlett-Shaw, Cllr Murphy (Chair) Cllr Westcott and Cllr Whetlor

In attendance: Sarah Reed, Town Clerk, Julie Hunns, Chair of KTSCA

20/95C To receive Apologies for Absence (LGA 1972, section 85 (1): Cllr Murphy proposed that *'the apologies given by Cllrs Campbell and Irven are accepted'*. Seconded by Cllr Whetlor. Carried

20/96C To receive Declarations of Interest:

Name	Minute No:	Description of Interest	Personal / Prejudicial	Action Taken
Cllr Westcott	20/98C (i)	Board member of CLOWNS organisation	Personal & Prejudicial	Councillor did not participate in the discussion and voting

20/97C Financial presentation for a Grant:

- (i) Knights Templar School Community Action (KTSCA) – *application circulated to members prior to the meeting together with audited accounts via Appendix 1* – Julie Hunns was invited by the Chair to make her presentation. She began by giving some background as to why the application was being made. In November, the KTSCA were approached by the Headteacher of Knights Templar School with a request for funding amounting to £3,376 for vital literacy materials to replenish and replace reading stock across the school. This includes providing contemporary books in each of the 7 classes at Knights Templar School, that are age appropriate and to cover more modern themes and diversity of subjects. Julie Hunns continued that the books are vital to the children's education and it will not only be the current intake of children who will benefit from the books as they will be available for future children coming into the school and have a shelf life of 3 years plus. Julie Hunns informed members that due to COVID 19 the Committee has not been able to fundraise and their accounts are at the lowest they have been since launching KTSCA 3 years ago, with approximately a quarter of the balance ring-fenced for other projects specified by the donors. The reason for making a request to the Town Council for a grant is that the Committee do not have the funds to meet the school request. Julie Hunns concluded that the school cannot purchase the books within their current budget as it has struggled due to using funds for additional cleaning and extra cleaning products to meet the COVID 19 safety practices, to ensure that everyone at the school remains safe.

There then followed a question-and-answer session, with Julie Hunns concluding her presentation with a financial request for a grant of £2,800 to replace dated and damaged books.

The Chair thanked Julie Hunns for her presentation and informed her that in line with Council's financial Policy for grants and donations, the Committee would make a decision at the January Committee meeting.

Julie Hunns left the meeting at 6.43pm

20/98C Application for a financial donation:

- (i) CLOWNS – *paperwork was issued to members prior to the meeting via Appendix 2* – Cllr Westcott having declared a Personal and Prejudicial interest tried to leave the meeting at 6.43pm but encountered technical difficulties and could not do so, he did not participate in the discussion or voting. After a brief discussion, Cllr Whetlor proposed that **'£100 donation is awarded to CLOWNS in recognition of the valuable service they provide for the Watchet Community'**. Seconded by Cllr Murphy. Carried.

JS

20/99C Financial Matters:

- (i) **Once per quarter, the Chair of the Committee shall be appointed to verify bank reconciliations for all accounts produced by the RFO, the contents to be noted by this Committee, as per regulation 2.2 – Noted**
- (ii) **All payments above £500.00 and below £5000.00 are itemised and reported to this Committee, as per regulation 4.1 - Noted and signed off by the Chair of the Committee**
- (iii) **All payments issued for payment outside of Full Council Meetings, shall be reported to this Committee, as per regulation 6.6 – Nothing to report**
- (iv) **To consider the renewal of the SLCC membership for 2021-22 – The Clerk had circulated the costings report prior to the meeting. After a brief discussion, Cllr Murphy proposed that *'the SLCC membership for 2021-22 is renewed at a cost of £262.00 per annum'*. Seconded by Cllr Westcott. Carried.**

20/100C Exclusion of Press and Public

"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" (Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960

Cllr Murphy proposed that *'in view of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted that Standing Order 1c is invoked and the public are instructed to withdraw from the meeting'*. Seconded by Cllr Westcott. Carried

See Excluded Notes 20/38EX

20/101C Staffing budget – Draft precept 2021-22 – paperwork had been issued to members prior to the meeting via **Appendix 3- members agreed to a 2% increase in the Payroll, Pensions and National Insurance budget totalling £96,579 to be included in the 2021-22 precept and recommended to Full Council at the January meeting.**

Cllr Murphy proposed that *'the public are re-admitted to the meeting'*. Seconded by Cllr Whetlor. Carried

20/102C Draft Precept 2021-22:

To consider the draft Precept for 2021-22 – *working papers had been circulated to members prior to the meeting via **Appendix 3.1***

Cllr Murphy presented the following report - The budget strategy this year has been to achieve a 0% rise in the precept. This is in recognition that this has been a difficult year for most of the Council Taxpayers in Watchet and the impact of Brexit is unknown but likely to put further pressure on people as the pandemic continues. This Council does not want to place extra burdens on residents at the present time. The Council needs to be able to deliver services to residents and visitors to the town so does not wish to reduce the precept demand.

The Town Clerk has produced a recommendation which accomplishes this and is to be commended for her work. The recommendation keeps the level of income offset the same level as last year - this is where the total required by the Council is reduced in anticipation of income being received during the year. The total precept is the same as last year at £182,980.

In recognition of the support to the town from the staff of the Council, there is provision for a 2% pay increase notwithstanding the announcement of a selective public sector pay freeze from the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The hard work and loyalty of the staff during the pandemic is to be applauded.

The rise in running costs has been held down and all four committees of the Council have made budget requests at the same level as last year. Projects have been reduced and the level of reserves has risen during the year as not all budget headings have been spent. This means that when the Committee reviews earmarked reserves next month, provision can be made for such items as Climate Change and COVID-19 support from reserves as well as other items of spend that members wish to include in the Council's operational programme. The current level of earmarked reserves is attached for information.

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RECOMMENDATION:

The main aim of the Committee is to achieve as small an increase to the Band D Council Tax charge for the Watchet taxpayer, a consequence of this is a 0% increase in the 2021-22 Precept figure which remains the same as last year at £182,980, this equates to a 1% increase in the Band D charge from £2.83 per week last year to £2.88 in 2021-22. This allows the Town Council to maintain its existing services and effectively manage Council assets.

Explanation of Band D cost to the Watchet tax payer:

The Clerk/RFO sought advice from the section 151 Officer at SW&T Council, and there are several factors included in calculating the tax base. The tax base determines what each household in Watchet will pay in their Council Tax contribution. All homes are given a council tax valuation by the Valuation Office Agency and a different amount of Council Tax is charged to each band. Most houses in Watchet are bands B & C and these bands are calculated at a certain percentage of the band D charge. Somerset West & Taunton Council collects Council Tax on behalf of a range of authorities i.e. Somerset West & Taunton Council, Somerset County Council, Avon & Somerset Police, Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service, Somerset Rivers Authority and Parish/Town Councils to enable them all to deliver their services.

Cllr Westcott proposed that '*a precept figure for the 2021-22 budget of £182,980 is recommended to Full Council at the January meeting for approval*'. Seconded by Cllr Murphy. Carried.

20/203C Matters for the next meeting:

- (i) Liaise with the Clerk

Meeting closed at 6.54pm

Signed: 

Dated: 12/1/21