

Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting
held on Monday 17 January 2022 at 7.00pm

Present: Cllr Bowden, Cllr Brake, Cllr Campbell, Cllr Corlett-Shaw, Cllr Ellwood, Cllr Irven (Chair), Cllr Johnson, Cllr Murphy, Cllr Richards, Cllr Terrett, Cllr Westcott and Cllr Whetlor.

In attendance: Sarah Reed, Town Clerk

- 22/01EX** To receive Apologies for Absence (LGA 1972, section 85 (1)- **None received**
- 22/02EX** To receive any **Declaration of Interests** under Watchet Town Council's Code of Conduct (adopted on 9 July 2012) issued in accordance with the Localism Act 2011 and the Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012 Si No: 1464- **None at this point**
- 22/03EX** **Dispensation to set the Town Council Precept:** Under the Localism Act 2012, members who have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in land in the Watchet Parish will need a dispensation in order to participate in the business of setting the Town Council's precept. The Clerk having received the completed Dispensation Forms from members by noon on Monday 10 January 2022 will grant the dispensation to all members accordingly (*forms sent out with the agenda*) – **All forms were signed and submitted within the timescale enabling the Clerk to grant the appropriate dispensations.**
- 22/04EX** **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 Irven 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 Brake. Carried
- 22/05EX** **Financial Matters:**
- (i) To consider the recommendations from the Finance & General Purposes Committee for the 2022-23 Precept and to approve the Staffing Costs – circulated to members via **Appendix 1.1**
- See Excluded notes **22/49EX**- members approved a staffing budget for the 2022-23 precept of £112,670
- Cllr Irven proposed ***'the re-admittance of the public to the meeting'***. Seconded by Cllr Johnson. Carried.
- 22/06EX** **To consider the recommendations from the Finance & General Purposes Committee for the 2022-23 Precept:**
- (i) To approve Running Costs, Committee Budgets and Project Costs – circulated to members via **Appendix 1.2** – Cllr Murphy presented the following report
- The RFO has drawn up a draft precept for 2022 - 2023 which is ambitious. It is a precept for a restructured Council which is building on the strengths of its staff. The aim is to be in a position to take advantage of the forthcoming Unitary Council process. This is with the intention of bringing more assets under local management for the good of the people of Watchet.
- The staff are what makes Watchet Town Council an effective Council. This precept rewards their dedication and spreads the administrative burden wider by building on their skills.
- Bound up with the precept is the earmarking of reserves for future projects around the Unitary agenda. There needs to be an initial discussion to consider what the ambition of the Council for taking on assets might be. Full Council will need to debate any proposals arising from our

discussions. Full Council in January will set the precept, but it must do so with consideration of what it wants to achieve regarding assets and reserves.

Cllr Murphy concluded that he hoped members will contribute to this debate at this challenging but exciting time for the future of Watchet.

After a long discussion, Cllr Murphy proposed that **'the recommendation from the Finance & General Purposes Committee to set a precept amount of £192,980 for 2022-23 is approved as detailed below'**.

PRECEPT	2022/23
Staffing Budget	£112,670
General Running Costs	£20,780
Committee Expenditure:	
Tourism and Recreation	£11,700
Environment and Planning	£8,000
Finance and Staffing	£17,700
Asset Management + Projects	£15,000
	£92,400
Income Received	-32,870
APPROVED PRECEPT	£192,980

The main aim of the Town Council is to achieve as small an increase as possible to the Band D Tax charge for the Watchet taxpayer, a consequence of this is a 5% increase in the 2022-23 Precept figure. This allows the Town Council to maintain its existing services and effectively manage Council assets.

Description	Amount payable per year- 2022/23	Amount payable per week- 2022/23	increase-household per week from 2021-22
	Based on a precept of £192,980		
Band 'B' Properties	£121.43	£2.34	£0.10
Band 'C' Properties	£138.78	£2.67	£0.11
Band 'D' Properties	£156.13	£3.00	£0.12

Seconded by Cllr Johnson. Carried.

- (ii) To approve earmarked reserves for 2022-23- circulated to members via **Appendix 1.3**

A list of Watchet assets in the ownership of Somerset West & Taunton Council (SW&T) were circulated for discussion. It was highlighted by Cllr Murphy that as vesting day for the new Unitary Authority is in April 2023, it was vital that members express an interest in Watchet asset transfers to ensure that the assets are safeguarded for the community. The asset list was discussed at length in conjunction with the proposed ear marked reserves, and several assets of interest were highlighted. Members agreed that a dialogue with SW&T Council to explore the Watchet assets was a priority. Cllr Murphy proposed that **'the ear marked reserves for 2022-23 are approved at £152,000, and the acquisition of the agreed earmarked assets for transfer to Watchet Town Council from Somerset West & Taunton Council is explored and approved in principle'**. Seconded by Cllr Johnson. Carried.

Members agreed to note the estimated bank balance at the end of financial year of £ 247,362 as presented by the RFO as follows:

In line with guidance set out in the 'Governance & Accountability for Smaller Authorities - A Practitioners Guide to Proper Practices' the bank balance at the end of the financial year (31 March 2022) should reflect 50% of the Precept for 2021-22 plus earmarked reserves for that same period. Precept for 2021-22 = 50% of £182,980 = £91,490 + earmarked reserves of £135,499 = **£226,989** as the remaining spend figure is estimated and there is a difference of 8.97% this demonstrates good practice and good financial management.

22/07EX Grounds Maintenance Vehicle:

- (i) To consider the purchase of an Alke ATX electric vehicle, details circulated to members via **Appendix 2**

A long discussion ensued, where several members supported the purchase in line with the Climate Emergency strategy already declared by the Town Council, and supported the extensive research undertaken by the Groundsman to source the most suitable and cost-effective vehicle to undertake the grounds maintenance duties.

Cllr Ellwood proposed that the '**Alke ATX electric grounds maintenance vehicle is purchased for the net cost of £28,700**'. Seconded by Cllr Terrett.

Cllr Westcott proposed an amended proposal that '**a vehicle at a cheaper cost is explored before making the purchase**'. Seconded by Cllr Richards. With 3 votes for and 9 votes against the amended proposal is defeated.

The original proposal by Cllr Ellwood was then considered, with 9 votes for, 2 votes against and 1 abstention, the motion was carried.

22/08EX Western Power Grant for alleviation of fuel poverty and provision of advice – the following report compiled by the Clerk in conjunction with Cllrs Irven and Johnson was presented-

Background:

The Town Council was successful in being awarded £10,000 for alleviation of fuel poverty in Watchet. Although the Town Council is the accountable fund holder, the actual fund is to be distributed in partnership with Citizen's Advice West Somerset and Village Agents (Community Council Somerset CCS)

A preliminary discussion was held via ZOOM on 13 January 2022 with all partners to explore how a recommended approach on how this project could be delivered, could be presented to Watchet Town Council at the Extraordinary meeting on the 17 January 2022. There is a very tight deadline for spending the fund by 31 March 2022.

Present:

Watchet Town Council (WTC) - Sarah Reed, Proper Officer/RFO, Cllrs Johnson and Irven
Somerset Citizens Advice (CAWS) - Ian Atkinson
Village Agents (VA) - Izzy Sylvester
Ward Member SW&T Council- Ian Aldridge ward member

Outcomes of the meeting:

- Both CAWS and VA can deliver the programme within the required timescales and submit monitoring reports to WTC to not only meet the terms and conditions of the fund, but to also demonstrate how monies can be spent according to the requirements of the WTC programme proposal.
- CAWS would be flexible on allocations between CAWS and VA to ensure monies were appropriately allocated and not have to be returned to Western Power if unspent by the 31 March 2022.
- A short letter of agreement would be set up as an extension of the current SLA between WTC and CAWS/VA showing how the programme will be funded, administered, and governed.
- The agreement will confirm that up to £8,000 to CAWS and £2,000 to VAs will be paid. Release of funds will be subject to appropriate invoicing against expenditure after it has been approved, rather than transferring funds prior to expenditure. Confirmation that the individual item spends within the invoice total meet the grant criteria will be provided with the periodic invoice.
- To allow the agreement to be initiated and the process to start, an initial 'cash float' will be provided to CAWs and VA at the start of the agreement, which is reconciled against an expenditure invoice. The amount of the 'cash float' as recommended by the RFO is

£500 to Village Agent and £1,000 to Citizen Advice, to be topped up when appropriate, and subject to an offset invoice and breakdown of spend. The RFO will keep Full Council updated on a regular basis on the cash float allocations.

- This approach will provide a sufficiently flexible response for distributing funds within the tight timescales with appropriate financial governance, whilst minimising WTC administrative demands.
- Funds should be spent in Watchet, with CAWS and VA ensuring the needs of Williton are covered via other appropriate funding.
- CAWS confirmed that the Somerset Household Fund is separate from and does not duplicate the Western Power funding

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Proper Officer/ RFO is given delegation to execute the relevant agreements with CAWS and VA based on this report. Ongoing monitoring of the programme will be delegated to the Proper Officer/RFO as advised by the existing partners and/or with any other advice as appropriate.

Cllr Whetlor proposed that the '*recommendation as presented is approved*'. Seconded by Cllr Johnson. Carried.

Meeting closed at 8.12pm

Signed: 

Dated: 