

Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee
held on Monday 13 December 2021 at 6.30pm

Present: Cllr Bowden, Cllr Campbell, Cllr Murphy (Chair) and Cllr Whetlor

In attendance: Sarah Reed, Town Clerk,

21/160C To receive Apologies for Absence (LGA 1972, section 85 (1)): Cllr Murphy proposed that the 'apologies from Cllrs Corlett-Shaw, Iven and Westcott are approved'. Seconded by Cllr Campbell. Carried.

21/161C To receive Declarations of Interest: None at this point

21/162C Parish and Town Council Opening Up Safety and Reconnecting Communities Fund- to consider applications from:

- (i) Watchet Sea Scouts – Cllr Whetlor proposed that 'a grant of £500 is awarded on the condition that a set of accounts are submitted in accordance with the Councils financial grants policy'. Seconded by Cllr Campbell. Carried.
- (ii) Watchet Bowling Club- Cllr Murphy proposed that 'as the paperwork is in order, a grant of £200 is awarded'. Seconded by Cllr Bowden. Carried.

21/163C Service Level Agreement with Citizens Advice WS:

- (i) To appoint one member of the Committee to join the Chair and the Council representative on outside bodies to attend quarterly review meetings – Cllr Whetlor proposed 'Cllr Campbell is appointed'. Seconded by Cllr Murphy. Carried.

21/164C 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 – Noted and signed off by the Chair of the Committee
- (iv) Annual Subscription to Society of Local Council Clerks – paperwork circulated as Appendix 2 – Cllr Murphy proposed that the 'annual subscription for 2022-23 is approved and £270 paid'. Seconded by Cllr Whetlor. Carried

21/165C Cemetery Matters:

- (i) Donation of trees from a resident to be planted in the Garden of Remembrance- paperwork circulated to members prior to the meeting via Appendix 3 – Cllr Murphy proposed 'that the kind offer is accepted, the resident is thanked, and the Groundsman is authorised to site the trees in the appropriate location'. Seconded by Cllr Campbell. Carried.
- (ii) To approve the Policy document for the 'Memorial Safety Inspection Process'- paperwork circulated to members prior to the meeting via Appendix 3a- Cllr Murphy proposed that 'the policy document is adopted'. Seconded by Cllr Whetlor. Carried.
- (iii) To note the update report from the Cemetery Administrator on the Memorial Audit and actions – paperwork circulated to members prior to the meeting via Appendix 3b – so noted.

21/166C 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 Campbell. Carried

See Excluded Notes 21/48EX

21/167C Staffing:

- (i) To consider the salaries element of the draft precept 2022-23 – *working papers circulated to members prior to the meeting via Appendix 4a*

Cllr Murphy read out a report supporting the RFO's recommendations for future staffing costs and after an in-depth discussion, members agreed to recommend to Full Council that the salaries element of the 2022-23 precept is £112,670.

Cllr Murphy proposed the '*re-admittance of the public*'. Seconded by acclaim. Carried.

21/168C Draft Precept 2022-23:

- (a) To consider the draft precept for 2022-23 with a view to making recommendations to the January Full Council meeting- *working papers were circulated to members prior to the meeting via Appendix 4b* – Cllr Murphy read out 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 in regard to 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 '*A precept amount of £192,980 for 2022-23 is recommended to Full Council at the January meeting*'. Seconded by Cllr Campbell. Carried.

The Watchet assets list owned and supplied by Somerset West & Taunton Council was circulated for discussion together with the proposed ear marked reserves for 2022-23.

A brief discussion ensued whereby Cllr Murphy proposed that '*earmarked reserves for 2022-23 are recommended to Full Council at the January meeting at £152,000 together with a list of potential future asset transfers*'. Seconded by Cllr Whittor. Carried

21/169C Matters for the next meeting:

- (i) Liaise with the Clerk

Meeting closed at 7.35pm

Signed: 

Dated: 11/1/22