

**Minutes of the Finance & Staffing Committee
held on Monday 11 December 2023 at 6.30pm**

Present: Cllr Brake, Cllr Campbell, Cllr Irven, Cllr Murphy, (Chair), Cllr Whetlor and Cllr Westcott

In attendance: Sarah Reed, Town Clerk,

- 23/43C To Receive Apologies for Absence:** (LGA 1972, section 85 (1))
Cllr Murphy proposed that ***'the apologies given by Cllr Ellwood are accepted.'***
Seconded by Cllr Campbell. Carried.

- 23/44C 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.

| Name | Minute No: | Description of Interest | Personal / Prejudicial | Action Taken |
|-------------|---------------|----------------------------|------------------------|---|
| Cllr Irven | 23/50C (i) | Financial Director of WCCT | Personal & Prejudicial | Councillors withdrew from meeting and did not participate in the discussion and voting. |
| Cllr Murphy | 23/50C (i) | Line Manager | | |

- 23/45C To confirm and sign the Minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2023-** *circulated to members prior meeting via Appendix 1-* (LGA 1972, Sch 12 Para 41) - Cllr Murphy proposed that ***'the minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2023 are approved as a true and accurate record.'*** Seconded by Cllr Campbell. Carried.

23/46C Application for a Financial Grant:

- (i) Watchet Carnival Committee – *paperwork circulated via Appendix 2*

Bob Hornby was welcomed by the Chair and continued to give some background to how the carnival parade will be replaced by a Mardi Gras format and discussions on rebranding are ongoing. The Carnival fete will follow the same format but there will be no air display this year due to cost but may be revisited and reinstated in the future. Extra fundraising is planned to cover the extensive increase in the road closure fee which has gone up from £25 to £1,600. The Carnival Committee are in discussions with the traffic management team, Bridgwater Carnival, who are working on a potential concession for charitable events, as this increase is impacting on minor events throughout the county. This instigated a brief debate, whereby Cllr Irven as the Council representative on the Local Community Networks, and Cllr Whetlor under her capacity as Chair of SALC stated that they would raise this at the next LCN meeting. Bob Hornby requested a grant amount of £3,000.

There then followed a question-and-answer session, where clarification was sought on the presented accounts which didn't balance.

Cllr Murphy thanked Bob Hornby for his presentation and informed him that in accordance with the Councils' financial policy for awarding grants, a decision would be made by the Committee at the next meeting.

Bob Hornby left the meeting at 6.55pm



23/47C 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.
- (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.
- (iv) SLCC Annual subscription- transfer membership to the new Clerk, see **Appendix 3**. Cllr Murphy proposed that **'SLCC membership is approved for Joanne Grellier at a cost of £288 per annum plus £5 joining fee, applicable from January 2024'**. Seconded by Cllr Whetlor. Carried.

23/48C Draft Risk Management Policy:

- (i) To consider adoption, circulated via **Appendix 4** – Cllr Irven, EH&S advisor for the Council, made several comments regarding better definition of accountability and responsibilities, but commended the Deputy Clerk for a good effort. It was agreed that Cllr Irven would liaise with the Deputy Clerk and bring back to the next meeting a revised copy for approval, in conjunction with a review of the Risk Register.

23/49C Exclusion of the 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 **'due to the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, Standing Order (3d) is invoked, and the public are instructed to withdraw'**. Seconded by Cllr Whetlor. Carried.

23/50C Recommendations from the Personnel Committee- See Appendix 5

Having declared Personal & Prejudicial interests in this item, Cllrs Irven and Murphy left the meeting at 7.02pm. In the absence of the Chair of Committee, Cllr Campbell led this item:

- (i) Update on the Community Vehicle Co-ordinator joining the Council team – the Clerk reported - as approved by Full Council, the role of the Community Vehicle Co-ordinator will be brought under the employ of Watchet Town Council. The salary is included in the precept budget circulated prior to the meeting via **Appendix 6a and 6b**. The Community Vehicle Co-ordinator who is currently employed in the role managed by WCCT will join the Council team on 1 January 2024. A draft copy of the 'Written Statement of Employment' had been circulated prior to the meeting or approval. After a brief discussion, Cllr Campbell proposed that **'to approve the 'Written Statement of Employment' for the Community Vehicle Co-ordinator and note the commencement date of 1 January 2024'**. Seconded by Cllr Whetlor. Carried.

Cllrs Irven and Murphy returned to the meeting at 7.11pm

- (ii) To consider a proposal for advisory services – as this proposal had been submitted by the current Clerk, she left the meeting at 7.14pm and this item was presented by the Deputy Clerk. After a brief discussion, members agreed to the proposal for the Clerk to return after her retirement for a 4-week period in January 2024, to train and advise staff members to ensure a smooth handover with the new Clerk.
- (iii) Update on the Deputy Clerk appointment – there were two applicants, one withdrew and the other withdrew from the interview due to illness, following advice from SALC this position can be appointed subject to references. This is being progressed by the Personnel Committee.

23/51C Staffing:

- (i) To consider the salaries element of the draft precept 2024/25 – *working papers issued prior to the meeting via Appendix 6a* – After several clarifications made by the RFO and Chair of Committee regarding the Council meeting its obligations to increase staffing salaries in line with the minimum living wage increase of £11.44 coming into effect in April 2024, Cllr Murphy



proposed that '**the staffing costs for the 2024-25 precept of £136,961 are recommended to Full Council at the January 2024 meeting**'. Seconded by Cllr Campbell. Carried.

See Excluded notes **23/19EX**

Cllr Murphy proposed '**the re-admittance of the public to the meeting**'. Seconded by Cllr Westcott. Carried.

23/52C Draft Precept 2024-25:

To consider the draft precept for 2024-25 with a view to making a recommendation to Full Council in the January meeting – see **Appendix 6b** – Cllr Murphy introduced this item stressing the importance of keeping the budget and precept at a minimal increase considering the cost-of-living crisis affecting so many in the community. As more houses have been built and there are more people contributing to council tax this has affected the tax base, but Council also needs to deliver their services, which are proving costly, and this budget which has been carefully thought out reflects this balance.

Cllr Murphy proposed that '**a precept of £205,093 for 2024-25 is approved showing a 3.27% increase in all Tax Bands, detailed below:**

| Tax band | 2023-24 | 2024-25 | increase |
|----------|---------|---------|----------|
| A | £102.66 | £106.02 | £3.36 |
| B | £119.77 | £123.69 | £3.92 |
| C | £136.88 | £141.36 | £4.48 |
| D | £153.99 | £159.03 | £5.04 |

Seconded by Cllr Westcott. Carried.

Members thanked the Clerk/RFO and Cllr Murphy for their input in producing a cost-effective budget for 2024-25.

23/53C Matters for the next meeting – no discussion or decisions made

- Liaise with the Clerk
- Application for a financial grant – Watchet Carnival Committee
- Revised Risk Management Policy
- To set ear marked reserves for 2024-25

Meeting closed at 7.49pm

Signed.....

Date.....2024 15 Jan.....