



**MINUTES OF THE F&GP MEETING
HELD ON TUESDAY 19 NOVEMBER 2019 AT 7PM
AT THE OFFICES OF BIGGLESWADE TOWN COUNCIL
THE OLD COURT HOUSE, 4 SAFFRON ROAD, BIGGLESWADE**

PRESENT:

Cllr H Ramsay (Chair)
Cllr D Albone
Cllr I Bond
Cllr G Fage
Cllr F Foster
Cllr M North
Cllr M Russell

Mr Philip Truppin BTC Locum Clerk
Derek Kemp DCK Accounting Solutions, Managing
Director & Principal Consultant
Miss H Calvert Meeting Administrator

Members of Public – Cllr M Knight, Mr R McGregor BTC Town Clerk (Item 1-8a & 8g),
Mr S Newton, BTC TCOM

19/1101 1. APOLOGIES

None

ABSENT

None

19/1102 2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

- 19/1102.1 a. Disclosable Pecuniary Interests in any agenda item – none
- 19/1102.2 b. Non-pecuniary interests in any agenda item – none

19/1103 3. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

There were no public comments.

19/1104 4. MINUTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF MEETINGS

- 19/1104.1 a. Members received and approved the Minutes of the Finance & General Purpose (F&GP) Meeting held on Tuesday 16 July 2019.

19/1105 5. **MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

19/1106 6. **ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION**

19/1106.1 a. **Budgets**

Members welcomed Derek Kemp of DCK Accounting Solutions to the meeting.

Members were asked to review the two budget summaries presented and to decide on which budget to adopt for the 2020/21 financial year.

The following was noted:

- The budgets have been prepared with the unknown factors of salary awards and pension fund evaluations. The budget summaries allow for a 5% increase on salaries across the board and a 1% increase on employer contributions pension costs.
- The budgets have been drawn up to include the £20k allocated to the Neighbourhood Plan and the £15k allocated to Market Square Events. All other increases in the budget are purely on an inflationary basis.
- Expenditure has been examined when producing the budget, and members were reassured that there were no viable options to reduce the day-to-day running costs. Furthermore, members were informed that staff salaries accounts for over 50% of total net expenditure.
- The population of Biggleswade has increased greatly and is set to increase further with the proposed residential developments. This will result in any increase in the precept having a reduced impact per Band D household, despite this being the smallest increase in tax base over the last four years.

Members were made aware that the accounts are short of the desired general reserve level, in which it is advised to keep aside three months' worth of revenue. The budget summary, as set out in Option 2, addresses these concerns and allows for a £20k surplus. It was noted that if a surplus of £20k is accounted for over the next six financial years then this will rectify the £119k shortfall in the general reserve level.

Members reviewed the following budget options:

Option 1 is to require a precept increase of 15.39%, equivalent to 12.65% for a Band D household after adjustment for the increase in the tax base. This amounts to an increase per Band D household of £0.33 per week. It was noted that this budget option does not address the deficit.

Option 2 is to require a precept increase of 17.37% equivalent to 14.59% for a Band D household. This amounts to an increase per Band D household of £0.38 per week. It was noted that this budget addresses the deficit issue by allowing for a £20k surplus.

Members **RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND** that Council use the budget summary that sets the precept required for 2020/21 at 17.37%.

19/1106.2 b. **Fees for 2020/21**

Members considered and approved the following fees:

- I. Allotment Fees: It was **RECOMMENDED** to keep the allotment charges the same.
- II. Memorial and Burial Fees: It was **RECOMMENDED** to keep all fees the same.
- III. Market Fees: It was **RECOMMENDED** to keep all fees the same and to review these charges again in October 2020.
- IV. Orchard Community Centre Fees: It was **RECOMMENDED** to raise the charge for the main hall to £20 per hour and the cost of setting up and/or clearing up the hall to £20 per hour; all other fees to remain the same.
- V. Sports Facility Fees: It was **RECOMMENDED** to keep all fees the same.

19/1106.3 c. **BTC Social Media Policy**

Members **RESOLVED** to adopt the BTC Social Media policy with the following alterations:

- The last bullet point on item 6.5 to read 'engaging in controversial or political debate'.
- To delete any repetition of points on page 11.
- To include 'Members should be cognisant of the code of conduct' in item 3.
- To replace the reference to the 'Data Protection Act 1998' in Appendix C to take account of the 'General Data Protection Regulation 2016' (GDPR).

It was further **RESOLVED** to set up the SMAT email address.

19/1106.4 d. **BTC Website**

Members considered the Working Group report.

Cllr Foster circulated recommendations to members to go alongside the BTC Website report.

It was suggested that consideration be given to conducting a separate exercise to decide on how to proceed with the website.

Members further suggested that the website is checked weekly to ensure that it is kept up to date, and to check that uploaded documents that are approved by Council are the latest versions.

Members **RESOLVED** to approve the report and recommendations as follows:

- To action the 'improvements or corrections' list produced by the Working Group.
- Update from FTP to a more secure transfer system.
- Review and readopt all 'Constitution' and similar documents.
- To continue the review process of the existing site.
- Set in motion the tender process for a new website to comply with the Website Accessibility Regulations.
- That Item 6 on the recommendations read 'Include a regular review process for all 'constitution' type documents'.
- To nominate an Administrator (with a deputy to cover sickness and leave) to be 'Website Controller'.
- To include a search box on the current website.
- That the new website is to be mobile and tablet friendly.

19/1106.5

e. **Financial Regulations Review**

Members reviewed the draft Financial Regulations document. Members were asked to consider and adopt the alterations to the document.

The following was noted:

- That there have been recent issues in approving payments and paying salaries due to absence and lack of authority. The regulations have been reviewed and altered in light of these experiences.
- The new regulations will allow the Council to make payments without using a cheque if we wish to do so.
- Members attention was drawn to new items 6.15 – 6.20 that have been inserted into the document from the latest version of the NALC model regulations. Members were asked to consider and adopt these points.

It was **RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND** to adopt the financial regulations with the following amendments:

- The maximum transaction value of the debit card issued should be changed from £500 to £300 (Item 6.18).
- To take out any reference to an RFO as the clerk is the RFO.
- That a pre-paid debit card be issued to the Office Manager with a limit of £200 (Item 6.19).
- To delete item 1.14 as this is in contradiction to item 4.
- To further delete items 2.2, 3 (preamble), and 6.6.
- To amend item 5.2 to reflect current practice whereby schedules of payments authorised is presented to Council replacing the current text.
- To delete item 5.7 as the internal auditors control the risk of duplicated payment being authorised and / or made.
- To amend item 6.5 from 'cheque counterfoil' to 'supporting paperwork'.

It was further **RESOLVED** to discuss the procedures for authorising salary payments at the F&GP meeting on the 21st January 2020. It was

suggested for consideration that the salary payments could be wholly dealt with by George Hay Partnership LLP.

19/1106.6 f. **Risk Management Scheme Review**

Members reviewed the Risk Management Review document put together by the Locum Clerk.

It was noted that under 'Data Protection' and 'Confidential Matters' the likelihood of risk requires review due to automatic forwarding of councillors' emails to their personal accounts.

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the Risk Management Scheme and Review documents with the following amendments:

Page 4

1st floor office, Old Courthouse – delete as now no longer available to rent, now used as TC office space

Page 5

Grants – Power to Pay, likelihood M, impact M; as TC has GPC assessments to be reduced to L & L

Staff -loss of key personnel -likelihood L; recent events summer 2019 suggest upgrade to medium

Page 9

Loss of key staff – likelihood L; recent events summer 2019 suggest upgrade to medium

New Community Centre – delete as is now operational.

Page 11

Accounts and Annual Return -Likelihood L; recent events summer 2019 suggest an upgrade to medium

To alter the likelihood of 'Data Protection' and 'Confidential Matters' to High.

19/1106.7 g. **Budget for Town Centre Events**

Members were asked to consider the budget for Town Centre events for 2020/21.

Members thanked the Town Centre Operations Manager for his informative Town Centre Events update. Members felt that it would be beneficial to see a long-term plan of events, and to replace the proposed VE and VJ events after 2020.

Members were encouraged to email the Town Centre Operations Manager with any suggestions of Town Centre Events.

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the recommendation of a £15k budget to provide for these Town Centre events.

19/1106.8 h. **Equipment Council Chamber**

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the immediate purchase of a timer, and to purchase a device to record audio of meetings. It was **RESOLVED** to bring back into use the public microphone during meetings.

19/1106.9 i. **Neighbourhood Plan**

Members were asked to consider a budget for the NP group for 2020/21.

Cllr Russell proposed that £20k be allocated in next year's budget to cover work relating to the Neighbourhood Plan.

The £20k would be used to cover Strategic Environment Assessments and all other assessments, consultancy fees and a further public engagement event. The Neighbourhood Planning Group have appointed a consultant from Place-Make to undertake a visioning exercise of Biggleswade with fees of £5.5k.

Members **APPROVED** the proposal to allocate £20k in next year's budget to cover Neighbourhood Planning work.

19/1107 7. **ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

No items for information.

19/1108 8. **PUBLIC OPEN SESSION**

There were no questions from Members of the Public.

19/1109 9. **EXEMPT ITEMS**

The following resolution will be **moved** that is advisable in the public interest that the public and press are excluded whilst the following exempt item issue is discussed.

(12a Proposed Workshop and Store)

Pursuant to section 1(2) of the public bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 Council **resolve** to exclude the public and press by reason of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted.