

Ilminster Town Council

Finance & Policy Committee Minutes

A meeting of the Finance and Policy Committee was held on 29th January 2013 in the Council Chamber, The Council Offices, North Street, Ilminster, Somerset, starting at 19:30hrs

Present

Chair: Cllr D Miller
Councillors: P Burton, C Goodall, A Lawson, J Pallister, A Shearman, S Shepherd,
J Sothern, E Taylor, L Vijeh and P Whaites

In Attendance

J Norris (Town Clerk)
M Shelley (Deputy Town Clerk)
M Clayton (Senior Administrator)

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Austin and R Swann.

2. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made in respect of any items on the agenda

3. Minutes of previous Finance and Policy Committee meeting.

RESOLVED

- (i) to confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 13th November 2012 as a correct record subject to the following amendment:

Agenda item number 1, third bullet point down should read ‘Cllr Taylor stated that for any future events the Town Council were planning to run, they need to ensure there are clear and transparent written agreements with organisations on the splitting of revenue from activities linked to the event rather than a gentleman’s agreement’.

- (ii) to update action list relating to the Finance and Policy committee.
The Town Clerk reported to members that Somerset Webservices are the preferred new supplier of the website and they have issued the Council with an initial invoice of £1,000 to be paid in advance of work starting. This matter will be taken to the next Full Council meeting for a decision.

4. Budgets and Precept for 2013/14.

The Town Clerk informed the committee of the following:

- The setting of the budgets and the precept is a very important task.
- The decision last year to increase the precept by 39% was a very brave decision, and has left the Town Council in a better situation than if it had not been increase by this amount.
- The Government have changed the way it pays council tax benefits to the District Council. They now give them a grant which the District Council can choose to pass onto the Town and Parish Councils subject to them meeting a certain criteria.
- Ilminster is one of the most badly affected Councils in South Somerset due to this new scheme.

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- There will not be any capping for Town and Parish Councils this year.
- The Council needs to plan for the future as the District Council's grant could be taken away after 2013/14.

The Chair started discussions by explaining the precept options that have been calculated and asked Councillors to make sure they are aware of all the figures that have previously been discussed for each budget item before a precept amount can be proposed.

Comments which were raised included the following:

- If the precept has no change then the Council will not be able to maintain the service it provides at the moment and would not be able to start new projects that need doing.
- The budget figures need to include a contingency amount that is just an emergency fund for unforeseen expenditure such as Legal Costs. The Town Clerk will investigate whether legal costs are covered by our insurances.
- The Council could stop the grant scheme so that the precept does not have to increase as much.
- The Council need to be aware that there will be further cut backs in the future by Somerset County Council which will affect funding.
- Staff pay could be frozen if contracts of employment allow this. The Town Clerk will look into this matter but advised the committee that staff expenditure has already been reduced as the Council no longer pay overtime for extra hours worked.
- Staffing hours could be reduced once the administration is up to date and running efficiently.
- The Council need to look externally for revenue streams.
- **The publication of a newsletter to residents which includes an explanation of the Precept level. *this bullet point was added in accordance with Council's instructions – see minutes of meeting held on 19.03.13***

After further debate the following was proposed:

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the budget and precept be increased to £236,100.

5. Grants

The Town Clerk explained what the Council's grant policy is at present which includes that it does not have a ceiling limit for grants and that there is a time period when organisations can apply for a grant.

The Councillor's discussions included the following:

- The Council should let organisations apply for a grant throughout the year, not just for a selected time period. This way everybody would not be awarded at the same time and organisations wouldn't feel that there is a rush to put in an application for something they do not really need at that time.
- Some agencies/organisations would not get help for funding unless they have received a grant from the Town Council, however small the grant is.
- Some organisations get matched funding from the District Council, so if the Town Council does not give these applicants a grant they will lose the matched funding and the club/organisation could stop running.
- The Council's grant policy should be equal and fair for all organisations.

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- Grants are not to keep an organisation afloat.

RESOLVED that the Town Clerk writes up a draft grants policy and procedure for 2013/14

6. Grant Application

The Town Clerk informed the committee that a grant application has been made from the Ilminster Football Club for the dismantling of the football stand.

The committee's discussions included the following:

- The grant should be given for the full amount because the lease is not clear as to who is responsible for the stands
- The Football Club may be able to do the work themselves if they work to adequate Health and Safety requirements and they have the appropriate insurance.
- The Council will be able to scrap the metal which can be offset against the cost of the work.
- Further quotes will be needed which clearly state that The Council will be retaining the metal.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND

- a) That the Town Clerk obtains at least 3 quotations for the safe dismantling of the Southern end of the football stand, the quotations to include a breakdown of staffing and equipment costs and give a timescale for the work to be undertaken.
- b) That the Football Club be invited to submit a quotation for undertaking the dismantling work and that the value of such quotation be considered as their contribution towards the costs i.e. if they wished to use voluntary labour this would be classed as an "in kind" contribution.
- c) That following consultation with the Chairs of the Open Spaces and Finance & Policy Committees the Town Clerk is given delegated authority to accept the quotation which provides best value for money.
- d) That the scrap metal from the dismantled stands is the property of the Council but the value of such scrap metal can be offset against the grant requested by the Football Club.

7. Cemetery Fees

The Chair explained the burial comparison sheet and how our costs compare with Chard and Crewkerne Town Councils.

The Town Clerk explained that investigations have been made into our Open Spaces Wardens digging ashes plots for the Town Council rather than employing someone to do it. The fee for this would be about £30.00.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that cemetery fees for Ilminster Town Council be increased as follows:

- (1) Burial plot fee increase by 10%
- (2) Ashes Plot fee increase by 20%
- (3) All other burial fees increased by the current inflation rate of 3.1%

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8. HR Policies

This matter was deferred to Staffing Committee Meeting on Monday 4th February 2013.

9. Budget Monitoring

The Town Clerk explained that the documents are to keep members informed of the budget situation and to show what the Town Council has spent and will expect to spend this year.

10. Health & Safety Training

The Town Clerk explained that the Town Council must provide free health and safety training for all employees. There is an online facility which enables staff to carry out the training at their own leisure, at a cost of £45.00 per person.

Councillor Vjeh may have access to free training which she will let the Town Clerk have details on.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that unless it is possible to source free health and safety training to a level at least equivalent of that provided by the British Safety Council, Ilminster Town Council employees undertake the British Safety Council E learning packages Introduction to Workplace Health & Safety; Manual handling; Fire safety; Display Screen Equipment.

The meeting closed at 21:42

Chair's signature & Date