

SWAFFHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the **Finance Full Council** meeting on **Monday 8 February 2023** at **6.30pm** in the Council Chamber.

Present: Mayor Cllr S Bell (in the Chair),
Cllr Anscombe, Cllr Beech, Cllr Cooper, Cllr Darby, Cllr Edwards, Cllr Eves,
Cllr Matthews, Cllr Pilcher and Cllr Skinner

Town Clerk: R Bishop

Deputy Clerk: H Carrier

Member of public: None

1. Apologies received for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Bensley, Cllr Houghton and Cllr Scott

2. Declarations of Interest

None received.

Public Open Forum

No public in attendance

3. Urgent Items at the Chairman's Discretion

None received.

4. Finance Report

4.1. Revenue Budget

The Town Clerk and Deputy Clerk were tasked with identifying approximately a further £14,000 of savings, following the setting of the Precept at £494,500 covering the Revenue Budget for 2023-24. In the adjusted Draft Budget, the changed items are highlighted in gold and are recommended for approval.

Questions arising at informal meeting as follows: -

Q.1 underspend on Precept, is this available to move forward to this year's budget?

Answer: There is no 'underspend' on the Precept, the projected figures to the year-end are predicting a vast 'overspend' which is why our general revenue reserves are low. We still have two months of this financial year to account for... However, in principle, if there was an underspend it would automatically be carried forward in general reserves. It is already stated in your finance regulations, no expenditure is identified as Precept expenditure though.

Q.2 Days Field **money** when money arrives can it be invested to earn interest; 2-year deposit account?

Answer: Yes, of course a certain amount of the money could/should be invested straight away. You would of course need to establish, that you are not going to need this money for at least the 2-years, though, otherwise it would not be worth the effort. A sum of say £500,000 could easily be invested, possibly more, as it would provide a useful extra income through interest earned, that can be used for revenue purposes, or to get general reserves back up to the required level.

Another investment opportunity is the commuted sums, coming in for streetlights and play areas, these should be considered for longer-term investment for the same reasons.

Councillor asked the Town Clerk to review the chapel rates and for the Deputy Clerk to research a NS&I savings account.

4.2. To receive and consider Internal Audit Report following visit on 17th and 18th January 2023.

The interim internal audit identifies six recommendations as follows:

Recommendation	Response
Accounting and banking arrangements	
<p>R1</p> <p>We recommend that the periodic independent verification of bank reconciliations by a Council member, as required by Financial Regulation 2.2, should be reintroduced. Similarly, the independent check of the petty cash float should also be reintroduced. [NB: The reference to ‘cheque signatory’ in the Financial Regulation should also be updated to reflect the current arrangements for approving payments, which are now mainly via BACS]</p>	<p>Checking of Bank Reconciliations by a Councillor has not been carried out under the new Scribe system, and it is agreed that this should be addressed by the Council ASAP.</p> <p>From an administrative point of view, it is always best to have a Councillor signing off bank reconciliations to give added assurance to the Council as a whole, it is an essential part of our internal controls.</p> <p>Noted anomaly with financial Regulations, in respect of Cheque signatory and BACS payments, which will be addressed at the next review of this policy.</p>
Corporate Governance arrangements	
<p>R2</p> <p>A formal timetable for the review of policies and procedures should be put in place and this should be adhered to, going forward. This is of particular importance for the main governance policies – the Standing Orders and Financial Regulations – where there is a need to ensure that these reflect the latest guidance from NALC and any changes in legislation or “proper practices’, or in the Council’s own governance arrangements. The extant Standing Orders (SO 18b) also state specifically that “the Financial Regulations shall be reviewed regularly and at least annually for fitness of purpose”</p>	<p>There are mitigating circumstances which has taken the review of policies off track. Staffing changes, shortages, and sickness, also Councillor resignations, and Operation London Bridge.</p> <p>A programme timetable will be agreed before the year end 31st March 2023, and recommended to the incoming Council in May 2023.</p> <p>Financial Regulations and Standing Orders will be reviewed, prior to the existing council leaving office.</p>
Assessment and management of Risk	
<p>R3</p> <p>As previously planned, a review of the current financial risk assessment (FRA) process should be</p>	<p>The Financial Risk Assessments were reviewed on 23rd January 2023, with a view to overhauling this</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>undertaken, as soon as resources allow. However, in our view, it is important that the Council ensures that it has an appropriate overarching risk management policy/strategy in place and that the detailed risk assessments not only cover the financial risks, but also encapsulate the wide range of other risks facing the Council (e.g., strategic, compliance, operational, projects and events) and the controls that are in place to mitigate these.</p>	<p>policy for consideration in April 2023 – in preparation for the incoming Council.</p> <p>It is generally accepted that the current policy needs to be more comprehensive, but is adequate in the meantime, until such improvements are agreed by the Council.</p>
Budget Setting, Budgetary Control and Reserves	
<p>R4</p> <p>The functionality of the Scribe accounting software should be fully explored, at the earliest opportunity, to ensure that reports can be tailored, where possible, to the meet the needs of the Council (e.g., profiling of budgeted income and expenditure).</p>	<p>We are now 10 months into the first financial year and will seek to reap the benefit of the full capability of the Scribe system, certainly in years two and three. Profiling of budgeted income and expenditure can be done, so that month by month this can give greater accuracy.</p>
Review of Income	
<p>R5</p> <p>The legal position regarding the period of notice that the Council is required to give to allotment holders prior to making an increase in allotment rents should be clarified</p>	<p>This is confirmed as 12 months, and therefore delays some of the planned increases in the pipeline. Finance Full Council need to consider Allotment Rents at their July meeting annually, to ensure that if/when rents are increased, the correct notice is given at the time of sending out invoices at Michaelmas (29th Sept), for the following year.</p>
Salaries	
<p>R6</p> <p>All staff should be issued with contracts of employment which accurately reflect the agreed SCP range and contracted hours of employment. The contracts should be signed by the employee and employer, with a signed copy retained on each member of staff's employment file.</p>	<p>The HR advisor has completed the draft model contract, which has been agreed by the HR Committee, these now need to be formalised with the salary details and job description for each member of staff.</p> <p>The Town Clerk has now prioritised this work for late February/early March, with the Deputy Clerk deputising in meetings, to allow the Town Clerk sufficient time to complete this task.</p>

4.3 Minutes of Full Council meeting 10 October 2012 and Finance & General Purposes Committee 17 October 2012 in relation to decision on Streetlight at Redland Park

In a previous meeting it was agreed for the Town Clerk to establish when and where the decision was taken to take on street lighting at Redland Park. This was in two stages, first with

the Full Council on 10 October 2012 delegating a final decision to the Finance & G.P. Committee. A final decision was taken on 17 October 2012 at the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting.

4.4. Revise quotes for guttering for front of Town Hall

As an alternative quote had not been received it was agreed to defer this item to the next Full Council meeting.

5. Capital Budget and Budget Report 2023-24

5.1 Asset Review by Ingham Pinnock (Confidential listed under item 8)

Issues could arise out of this document, in item 5.3 and 5.4. The Town Clerk is to forward the Asset Review to Councillors,

5.2 Feasibility Study (Confidential listed under item 8)

Issues could arise out of this document, in item 5.5 and 5.6.

5.3 Public Toilets – use of rear of building or replacing/extending the building.

It was decided not to upgrade or change building but an increase of rent by 5% to the tenant was required

5.4 Town Hall – office space/council chamber/museum.

Cllr Edwards volunteered to look at the building plans to see what could be done with building and the best use of the space. It was agreed to set aside £100,000 to Capital Reserves from the money from the purchase of Days Field,, if the purchase completes, to make the necessary fire recommendations.

5.5 Barn Theatre & Flat

5.6 Barn Swimming Pool

These items were discussed together. It was decided to hold a public consultation to see what the residents of Swaffham on their opinion on the Barn and Swimming Pool. An open day will be held at the Assembly Rooms and the Deputy Clerk will produce a questionnaire and comments form through Survey Monkey. The Town Clerk will inform the Swimming Pool Association on these plans and invite them to participate in the consultation. It was agreed to disband with the Steering Group and all decisions would come to Full Council in the future.

6. ADMISSION TO MEETINGS ACT (PUBLIC BODIES) 1960:

CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS following the exclusion of the public and press.

It was agreed to invite the Swimming Pool to the Public Consultation before approving any more expenditure.

Meeting closed at 8pm

Chairman.....