



FINANCE, POLICY AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Minutes for the meeting held on **Wednesday, 22 November 2023**
At 7.00pm in Sandbach Town Hall.

Present Councillors: S Corcoran (Vice Chair), J Arnold, N Cook, K England, D Hegarty, M Mitchel, A Nevitt, T Wheatcroft, L Crane (Ex – officio)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr G Lindop (professional reasons), and Cllr M Deakin. Cllr S Corcoran assumed the Chair until item 3.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Non-pecuniary and non-prejudicial interests were declared by Cllr A Nevitt in respect of item 7 and generally by Cllr S Corcoran as CEC leader.

The Chair adjourned the meeting to allow questions relating to items on this Agenda from members of the public.

Three members of the public spoke in relation to the CEC proposals to reduce green space maintenance in the town, and the Town Council's potential provision to replace some of the anticipated reductions, contained in Item 6, Budget Recommendations. The basis of the charges was questioned. The Council was encouraged to resist the proposals but failing that to 'step up' and fill the gap. A question was also raised on this item relating to a proposed 25% increase on the Mayor's Allowance. These points were addressed as part of the debate for Item 6.

Mr. G Proctor spoke in support of Item 7.1b, South West Cheshire Scouts Association grant application, providing background information and answering specific member questions. Cllr A Nevitt explained that the grant applicant for item 7.1a was unable to attend the meeting as intended, due to an emergency situation.

Following these questions, the Chair reconvened the meeting.

3. ELECTION OF COMMITTEE CHAIR

Lead: Vice Chair

Cllr G Lindop had stood down from the Chair due to a change in work commitments. Cllr Crane commended his work on Policy Review in his short time as Chair.

Cllr A Nevitt nominated Cllr J Arnold as Chair and this was unanimously agreed.

Resolved: *Cllr John Arnold was elected as Committee Chair, following the resignation of the current Chair.*

4. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

To consider, under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 (as extended by s.100 of the Local Government Act 1972), press representatives and public be excluded from the meeting for any of the following items of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by virtue of the paragraph specified against the item.

Lead: Chair

Action: *No items were excluded from press and public.*

5. MINUTES OF THE FINANCE POLICY AND GOVERNANCE MEETING

[Attached: Minutes of the meeting held 9 August 2023]

Lead: Chair

Resolved : *2 points of accuracy were agreed for amendment and the minutes of the 9 August 2023 meeting were approved as a true record.*

6. 2024-25 DRAFT BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

[Attached: Budget Report and Supporting Documents]

Lead: Chair

The Chief Officer outlined the process of providing the baseline budget based on inflation factors, technical adjustments and agreed policy changes to date. Proposals to adjust this baseline budget, following the consideration of informal budget briefing and supporting information, were outlined as set out in the budget report. In response to the resident's question regarding the proposed increase of £500 to the Mayor's allowance budget of £2,000, Cllr Crane explained that this budget had not been increased for several years, was outstripped by the costs incurred of this role, and was treated as taxable income. In addition, she expressed a wish that the allowance should be sufficient to ensure that the role of Mayor was accessible to all councillors, not just those who could afford it. In response to the resident's points made in relation to the CEC Green Spaces Maintenance Strategy Consultation, the Chief Officer clarified that a provision of £15,000 was contained within the Council's draft revenue budget as an estimate of the potential costs which may be incurred by the Town Council, if it resolved to fund a compensatory service, and that the final costs were subject to further information and negotiation with CEC as their proposals developed.

Overall, the Committee felt that the draft budget was set at an appropriate level, included the necessary provisions, and ensured the precept would increase at an affordable level, bearing in mind the Town Council had not increased the Council tax Band D equivalent in recent years.

Resolved:

[Named vote – all councillors present voted in favour]

To recommend the following to Full Council:

- i) A 2024-25 net expenditure level £792,182
- ii) A 2024-25 precept level of £772,182, following use of £20,000 general reserves, to mitigate the annual increase;
- iii) Adjustments to Earmarked Reserves as shown in Appendix 3;
- iv) Use of general reserves, whilst adhering to the Council's Reserves Policy, as shown in Appendix 3;
- v) A Council Tax (Band D) rate per household of £86.84, representing a 5.02% increase on the previous year.

7. GRANTS APPLICATIONS (OVER £500 and UNDER £5,000)

7.1 Grant Applications (over £500 and under £5,000)

[Attached: Grant Applications received in Quarter 2
7.1a Sandbach Day of Folk & Morris Dance – requested amount £3,000;
7.1b South West Cheshire Scouts – requested amount £2,500;
7.1c Minerva Arts – requested amount £1,500]
[Links: <https://sandbach.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Minerva-Arts-redacted.pdf>;
<https://sandbach.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Minerva-Arts-Accounts-redacted.pdf>]

Lead: Chair

7.1a Folk and Morris Dance (£3,000)

The application for Folk & Morris Dance was debated at length. Cllr Cook felt there was inconsistency to the treatment of match funding following the 50% award relating to Spooky Saturday. The Chief Officer confirmed that the Town Council's current grant policy states that applications which have match funding will be favourably considered but that this did not rule out applications with no match funding, unless the policy was changed. The Chief Officer confirmed that although supported by specific members, the application was for an event to be run by an outside organisation, funded by grant from the Town Council. It would not therefore be a Town Council event and any additional council resources required would be subject to additional Council approval. It was confirmed that no payment would be approved until the event had been delivered, based on presentation of final invoices, as proposed by the applicant. The Committee also required the organisation's accounts being presented to the Chief Officer in advance of said payment. Grant awarded.

7.1b South West Cheshire Scouts (£2,500)

Members were keen to support this event and welcomed the opportunity to resolve outstanding questions with the applicant. Grant Awarded.

7.1c Minerva Arts (£1,500)

The applicant was unable to attend the meeting due to unforeseen circumstances. Grant application deferred.

Resolved:

7.1a *Folk and Morris Dance awarded up to a maximum of £3,000 upon the presentation of a) the organisations accounts and b) the final invoices for the event once it has been delivered to the Town.*

7.2 Grants Feedback

[Attached: Completed Grant Feedback Forms]

Lead: Chair

Committee welcomed the feedback and emphasised the need to receive information from the community grants awarded by the Council on behalf of the town to ensure community benefit and value for money.

Resolved: *the feedback was noted.*

8. POLICY REVIEW

[Attached: Policy Review Schedule]

Lead: Chair

The Council has been undertaking a comprehensive policy review since January 2022 and has thus far updated 9 key policies based on operational priorities. A more systematic approach is required which ensures all policies are updated and reviewed on a consistent basis.

Resolved:

- i) *The proposed indicative timetable was approved;*
- ii) *that each policy will be reviewed every 4 years, except where specific amendments are proposed and / or required, was approved.*

9. SPONSORSHIP POLICY

[Attached: Draft Sponsorship Policy]

Lead: Chair

At its meeting on 21 September 2022, the Council approved its policy for Sponsorship. It was agreed that the Council's criteria should be added to this policy in due course.

Resolved: *The updated policy was agreed as a recommendations to Full Council.*

10. QUARTERLY FINANCE REPORTS

[Attached: 10a Q2 2023-24 BACS & DD Payments made;
10b Q2 2023-24 CREDIT CARD Payments made;
10c Q2 2023-24 Payments made Current Acc;
10d Q2 2023-24 PETTY CASH Payments made]

Lead: Chair

Resolved: *The Quarter 2 financial reports were approved.*

11. ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

Lead: Chair

Resolved: *Policies under policy review timetable.*

12. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting is Wednesday 7th February 2024 at 7pm in Sandbach Town Hall.

Meeting closed at 8.40pm

Cllr J Arnold / CL

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