

LYDNEY TOWN COUNCIL

FINANCE AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING – 2013/12/09 – 12

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING held in the Council Chamber, Claremont House, Lydney on Monday 9 December 2013 at 7.51 pm.

PRESENT: Cllrs B Pearman (Chairman), B Berryman, D Biddle, C Harris and B Thomas

Cllr J Bevan
Cllr R Bonser
One member of the public
Mrs J Smailes – Chief Executive Officer (CEO)/RFO
Miss C Wheeler – Executive Officer (EO)

Cllr Pearman informed all present that no practice fire evacuation had been scheduled for the duration of the meeting. All attendees were then informed of the locations of the nearest fire exits.

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received and noted from Cllrs Matthews and Osborne.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllr D Biddle – Victoria Centre

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the Finance and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 21 October 2013 were confirmed as a true record. **Proposed by Cllr Harris, seconded by Cllr Berryman.** Unanimous.

4. **OPEN FORUM**

Cllr Pearman advised that an e-mail had been received from Cllr Osborne advising that the following questions had been raised by three members of the electorate:

- Will the Precept for 2014-2015 be reduced by £75,000?
- How many years will it take to pay back the additional borrowing of £75,000?
- As the Precept has had a percentage increase each year the original £75,000 has also increased percentage wise over the two years since, will the electorate therefore see a decrease this year of approximately £80,000 in the Precept?

Cllr Pearman advised that the Council operated in an open and transparent manner and as such, he was happy to provide a response to the questions either at the Annual Town Meeting, or directly (should Cllr Osborne provide contact details for the members of the electorate who raised the aforementioned questions) via one-to-one meetings. Councillors were encouraged to submit their views in disseminating a response to the questions raised. Cllr Harris advocated that Cllr Pearman should provide a response to the members of the electorate at the earliest available opportunity. Cllr Berryman also advocated that the questions (and the Council's response) should be included in the Annual Town Meeting. Cllr Pearman reminded his fellow Councillors that the Council had yet to agree its budget (and subsequent Precept demand) for the 2014/15 financial year and therefore proposed that a meeting would be arranged with the members of the electorate i) once contact details had been provided by Cllr Osborne, and ii) once the Council had set its Budget/approving its Precept demand in order to explain its content/planned expenditure. Unanimous.

Action by – Cllrs Pearman to request details from Cllr Osborne



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5. GRANTS

Lydney War Memorial Trust (Resubmission)

Prior to the meeting Members were provided with a copy of a letter which had been received from the War Memorial Trust Secretary, in which she provided clarification on the points raised by the Committee at its June 2013 meeting.

It was noted that only £1,800 remained in the “free grants” budgetary heading. After taking an opportunity and it was **proposed by Cllr Pearman** that a grant to cover the cost of kitchen materials of £338.40 and electrical materials of £120.00 be awarded. Unanimous.

Action by – the CEO

Victoria Centre

Due to Cllr Biddle’s previously declared interest which would require him to excuse himself from the chamber, it was **proposed by Cllr Pearman** that consideration of the grant application would be deferred until the next meeting. Furthermore, that a recommendation would be made that a grant of £400 would be awarded to the organisation, to be confirmed at the next meeting. Vote carried.

Action by – the CEO

Lydney Town Hall Trust Management Committee

Members were provided with a copy of a letter which had been sent to the Trust Secretary requesting details of match funding prior to release of the Council’s further award of £1,500. The CEO advised that a response from the Trust Secretary had yet to be received. Noted.

Forest of Dean Citizen’s Advice Bureau

Members noted the letter of thanks which had been received from the organisation.

Forest of Dean Age Concern

Prior to the meeting Members were provided with a copy of the letter which had been sent to Forest of Dean Age Concern requesting that they submit their grant request via the Council’s agreed application form. Members noted that the organisation had yet to submit a grant application form.

6. TRAINING

Tree Work Training

Following a request made at a Trust meeting, Members were asked to consider if they wished to investigate the feasibility of Town Council Ground Staff undertaking further training in order to enable them to conduct advanced work to trees (e.g. felling of large trees).

During discussion Members considered the insurance aspects of training Ground Staff to undertake advanced tree work. It was noted that Ground Staff were currently trained to undertake minor tree work (e.g. cutting up fallen trees). Cllr Berryman spoke on the need to undertake a survey/catalogue trees on Council/Trust land. Accordingly, **Cllr Berryman proposed** that the CEO obtain quotations to undertake a survey/catalogue trees on Council/Trust land. **Seconded by Cllr Harris**. Unanimous.

Action by – the CEO

Cllr Harris proposed that the request for Town Council staff to undertake further training to fell large trees be declined. **Seconded by Cllr Berryman**. The CEO sought confirmation that the Committee wished Town Council staff to continue to undertake remedial tree works



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(excluding large trees) only. Unanimous approval was voiced.

NEBOSH

Members were asked to consider approving the CEO's attendance on a NEBOSH course. Prior to the meeting Members were provided with an overview of the course which outlined the learning outcomes afforded. **Cllr Harris proposed** that the CEO undertake NEBOSH training at an estimated cost of £1,914.00 plus VAT, as she felt it vital that the Council had a fully qualified member of staff who would be able to make health and safety decisions on behalf of the corporate body. **Seconded by Cllr Berryman.** Vote carried. It was noted that the NEBOSH training would be undertaken by the CEO instead of continuing with her University studies at this time, given that the CEO had since completed the CEG Foundation Degree gaining a merit award.

Action by – the CEO

7. PRE-BUDGET 2014/2015 DISCUSSION

Prior to the meeting Members were provided with a copy of the NALC Chairman Briefing which had been issued on the Council Tax Benefit Support Grant (CTBSG), and the e-mail of 20 November 2013 which had been received from the Chief Officer of Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils (GAPTC) regarding budget and Precept setting. It was noted that Parish Councils were not capped at present, nor had any Referendum arrangements been put in place for Parish Councils Precept demands. Furthermore, that many Principal Authorities had indicated that they would not be passing on the CTBSG to Parish Councils, however, some Principal Authorities were seeking to delegate responsibilities to Parish Councils in a bid to reduce their budgets.

Cllr Pearman drew attention to the advice which had been provided by the Chief Officer of GAPTC who recommended that Parish Council's do not set their Budget and Precept demand until January 2014.

Members were provided with copies of the draft budget for 2014-2015 which had been produced using the CTBSG figures provided earlier in the day by Forest of Dean District Council. The CEO then gave an overview of the draft budget which had amalgamated the draft budgets agreed by each of the Council's Committees and also the donation requests from the two charitable Trusts for which the Council held sole Trustee status. Furthermore, Members were advised that the draft budget had been produced utilising known costs (e.g. Public Works Loan Board, utilities/running and contract provision) and also anticipated election costs which resulted in a draft budget of £513,323. It was noted that use of an offset figure based on a percentage of anticipated income and a sum taken from General Reserves would result in a Precept demand of £467,931 (a 4.6% increase from 2013-2014), which would enable the Council to continue to provide the level of service currently afforded to its electorate.

Discussion then took place on the draft budget and the CEO advised Members that Forest of Dean District Council had reduced the amount of CTBSG for 2014 by £6,000 from that awarded in 2013. Members were also advised that should the decision be taken to go Unitary, the Council needed to be in a strong position in order that it may then consider if it wished to take on any additional services. Following a recent meeting at Gloucestershire County Council Cllr Pearman was convinced that the decision would be taken to go Unitary within the next few years and he stressed the need to ensure that the Council needed to attain the required level of General Reserves. The need to correctly budget for the future

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was stressed to Members, together with the view that the draft budget enabled the Council to retain its current service provision, whilst allowing for the improvements required.

Consideration was given to increasing the budget so as to provide for a 4.74% increase in the Precept demand. Cllr Biddle expressed concern over the increase in the budget for the Cemetery and was advised that the Burial Committee had resolved to include provision for a free standing cremated remains unit and also funding towards green burial provision.

Cllr Bevan excused himself from the meeting at this point.

It was **proposed by Cllr Pearman** that the 2014-2015 draft budget would be increased to £513,500 resulting in a Precept demand of £468,500 (an increase of 4.74%); the contingency budget would increase from £177.40 to £500.00; that the predicted income figure would be reduced to £20,392; that the off-set taken from General Reserves would equate to £24,431.00. Furthermore, that the budget and Precept demand as outlined would be recommended to Full Council. Vote carried.

Discussion then took place on the future plans of the Amenities Committee and the Burial Committee. The Council were urged to take a long term view to identify projects they may wish to undertake, in order that Earmarked General Reserves may be sufficiently built up to fund such projects.

Death in Service Liabilities

Prior to the meeting Members were provided with a copy of an e-mail which had been received from the Council's Insurance Broker, the contents of which were noted.

8. **MEETING DATES**

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 24 February 2014.

Meeting closed at 8.45 pm

Chairman B. Pearman

Date 24/2/14