



## RESOURCES COMMITTEE

9 DECEMBER 2024 – 7.30 pm

### MINUTES OF MEETING

**Present:** Councillor Human, Chairman; Councillors Foice-Beard, Hoy, Imafidon, Meekins and Tierney.

**Apologies:** Councillor Wallwork.

**Public Participation:** None requested.

The minutes of the meetings of the Resources Committee held on 30 September and 28 October 2024 were confirmed and signed.

#### **R16/24 Wisbech Town Council's accounts 2024/25**

The Clerk (and RFO) reported to members on the council's financial position as at the end of the second quarter of the financial year 2024/25; he gave explanations as to variations between the estimated income and expenditure for that period and the actual financial position as at 30 September 2024.

As at 30 September 2024, the council had received 57% approximately of the estimated annual income and had incurred 59% approximately of its estimated annual expenditure based upon the figures set out in the council's revenue budget for the financial year 2024/25. In addition, the council had incurred expenditure (totalling £67,027) from its ear-marked reserves in respect of election fees (minute R26/23 refers), maintenance works to Wisbech Castle, the purchase of equipment for Wisbech Park Pavilion and highway works associated with the Market Place enhancement scheme.

The Clerk (and RFO) responded to members' questions.

Members decided that

- (1) the information reported by the Clerk (and RFO) be noted;
- (2) the accounts for the second quarter of the financial year 2024/25 be approved and that, in accordance with minute R3/19, a copy of the report presented by the Clerk (and RFO) be signed by the Chairman.

#### **R17/24 Financial support 2024/25**

Members considered applications from local groups/organisations for financial support from Wisbech Town Council for the financial year 2024/25.

The Clerk (and RFO) reminded members that Wisbech Town Council's budget for the financial year 2024/25 (agreed at minute 86/23) includes a sum of £19,000 for financial support and that consequent to the decisions at minutes 88/23, 99/23 and R27/23, R7/24 and R11/24, £5,280 remains available to fund organisations/groups' projects in the financial year 2024/25.

Members were reminded by the Clerk (and RFO) that this committee had decided (at minute R10/23) that, with effect from the financial year 2024/25, there would no longer be "automatic" financial support payments to groups and organisations; any group or organisation seeking financial support from Wisbech Town Council would need to make an application for such support. Some of



the activities which had received “automatic” special grants funding up to and including the financial year 2023/24 – i.e. the Wisbech and Fenland Museum, Wisbech in Bloom, Waterlees in Bloom and the Wisbech Christmas Fayre – now have their own allocations within the council’s overall budget.

The Clerk (and RFO) also reminded members that this committee had agreed that applications for financial support from Wisbech Town Council should relate to funding required to deliver specific projects/services/activities; not to contribute towards the organisation’s general operational costs (such as heating, lighting etc).

The Clerk (and RFO) presented to members a summary of three applications that had been received by the council since minute R11/24 for funding from the 2024/25 financial support budget, as set out below.

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Purpose of financial support</b>	<b>Amount requested</b>
Evolution Health and Wellness Centre	The cost of purchasing 5 folding tables (at £150 each) and 20 folding chairs (at £30 each) for use by attendees at the therapy sessions and workshops delivered by this organisation.	£1,350 (total project cost)
Nene Art School CIC	<p>The cost of venue hire (£200) and arts/craft supplies (£300) to deliver this project (weekly after-school/out-of-school sessions for young people aged between 8 and 18 years, with the aim of promoting/supporting their health and wellbeing through participating in drawing, painting and crafts) between January and June 2025.</p> <p>This council had previously provided (at minute R7/24) funding (of £500) towards the cost of running taster sessions for this project (total project cost of £2,500).</p> <p>As a result of the taster sessions, Nene Art School CIC has 36 students signed-up for its weekly sessions, as well 10 students on a waiting list.</p>	£500 (total project cost of £2,000)
The Armed Forces and Veterans Association Wisbech, on behalf of the Wisbech and Cambridgeshire Combined Corps of Drums	Contribution towards the cost of purchasing musical instruments and supporting items for the Wisbech and Cambridgeshire Combined Corps of Drums. The Wisbech and Cambridgeshire Combined Corps of Drums performs at military functions, including the Wisbech Remembrance Day Parade.	£300 (total project cost of £400)
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>£2,150</b>



Members were reminded by the Clerk (and RFO) that the council's guidance to applicants for financial support states that Wisbech Town Council will look at the following issues when assessing funding requests: contribution to social, environmental, economic wellbeing, community involvement and activities, social inclusion, any previous funding, purpose of the organisation and the nature of the assistance requested. The guidance makes it clear that applications submitted should relate to funding required to deliver specific projects/services/activities; not to contribute towards the group or organisation's general operational costs (such as heating, lighting etc).

The Clerk (and RFO) reminded members that it is a condition of any financial support provided by Wisbech Town Council that recognition is given in any literature/publicity produced by the recipient group or organisation to the financial support that it had received from the council; in addition, the recipient group or organisation is required to provide to Wisbech Town Council, at the end of the specific project, a brief report on the manner in which the financial support provided by Wisbech Town Council had been applied.

Members decided that

- (1) the information reported by the Clerk (and RFO) in relation to the applications considered at this meeting be noted;
- (2) application numbers 2 (£500) and 3 (£300) be supported in full;
- (3) applicant number 2 be requested to provide to the council, on a six-monthly basis, details of how well the project is operating (such as numbers of attendees, successful outcomes etc);
- (4) application number 1 be not supported, on the basis that, firstly, the Evolution and Wellness Centre would appear to be a commercial venture (not a charitable organisation or community group) and, secondly, that the purchase of equipment does not meet the council's meaning of delivering a specific project;
- (5) it be noted that, consequent to the decision at (2) above, the remaining balance of the council's financial support budget for the financial year 2024/25 is £4,480.

### **R18/24 Budget 2025/26**

Members considered an initial draft budget, which had been circulated by the Clerk (and Responsible Financial Officer (RFO)) in advance of the meeting, for the financial year 2025/26.

In presenting his report to members, the Clerk (and RFO) drew members' attention to several matters relevant to the setting of a budget (and Parish Precept) for the financial year 2025/26 (which he had considered in the preparation of the draft budget), including:

- when setting a budget, it is advisable to over-estimate expenditure and under-estimate income
- in producing an initial draft budget for the financial year 2025/26, the Clerk (and RFO) has been mindful of members' desire to minimise the financial impact upon households of any increase in the Parish Precept and has, where possible/feasible, retained income and expenditure figures for 2025/26 at the 2024/25 levels
- the figures within the initial draft budget for the financial year 2025/26 have been produced having regard for: actual income and expenditure for the financial year 2023/24; actual income and expenditure as at the end of month 8 for the current financial year (2024/25) plus projections for the remainder of 2024/25; any known or anticipated changes for the financial year 2025/26
- Allotments rent income figure has been increased considerably in the initial draft budget; this is due to the decision of the Environment and Public Spaces Committee (at minute E3/24) to



increase allotment fees from 6.0 pence to 12.0 pence per square metre per annum with effect from October 2025. Consequently, income from this source is anticipated to increase by around £7,000. The allocation for Allotments expenditure has also been increased (by £3,000)

- with regard to Wisbech Castle, it has been possible to increase the estimated annual income (due mainly to its success as a venue for paranormal investigations) for 2025/26 and to maintain the estimated expenditure at the same level as within the 2024/25 budget. The latter situation is possible because the day-to-day operation of Wisbech Castle is undertaken by volunteers (free-of-charge to the council). The estimates of income and expenditure for the financial year 2025/26 show Wisbech Castle generating an operational surplus (of £2,000); consequently, having no financial impact upon the local taxpayers. This has been the council's ambition since taking-on Wisbech Castle in 2018
- Wisbech Town Council has a long-stated ambition to make its programme of community events and festivals bigger and better each year. However, it is not possible to achieve such an ambition without making available the necessary financial resources. That is why the budget provision for 2022/23 had been increased (from £30,000 in 2021/22) to £40,000. In the budget for 2024/25 that figure had been increased to £50,000. In the initial draft budget for the financial year 2025/26 that figure is increased to £70,000. Events income has also been increased in the initial draft budget for the financial year 2025/26 from £7,000 (in 2024/25) to £10,000
- the Financial Support allocation within the initial draft budget for the financial year 2025/26 has been reduced to a level which reflects the anticipated spend in the financial year 2024/25
- the budget allocation for the provision of financial support to the Wisbech and Fenland Museum has been reduced from £17,500 to £15,000, in accordance with minutes R6/23 and R10/23
- the estimated expenditure on Local Highway Improvement (LHI) schemes has been reduced in the 2025/26 budget (from £4,000) to £2,000 to reflect the likely cost of the council's contributions towards the cost of the three schemes that have been submitted by the council to the Local Highway Authority for that financial year (minutes 44/24 (1) and 59/24 refer)
- for the financial year 2025/26 the initial draft budget includes, for the first time, estimates of income and expenditure in relation to the St Raphael Community Hall (minute R3/24 refers)
- because of the need to "step-up" repair and maintenance works to the building, the Town Hall Repairs/Improvements budget has been increased from £5,000 to £10,000 in the initial draft budget for the financial year 2025/26
- it has been possible to reduce the expenditure on Christmas Lights Installation in the initial draft budget for the financial year 2025/26 because of savings achieved as a result of the council entering-into a new Christmas Lighting Installation Contract (minute R12/24 refers)
- all local government employees were awarded an "inflationary" pay increase of £1,290 for full-time equivalent posts for the current financial year (2024/25). The implications of that have been factored-in to the initial draft budget for the financial year 2025/26, as well as estimating for a further 2.5% increase in 2025/26. Estimated expenditure on Employers' Pension contributions reflects the current contribution rate. The cost of Employers' National Insurance contributions for the financial year 2025/26 has been revised to reflect the increase which will take effect on 1 April 2025.

Given the increase in workload that has resulted from Wisbech Town Council continuing to expand its service delivery (including taking-on the operation and management of the public toilets at the Horsefair Shopping Centre, Wisbech Park Pavilion and the St Raphael Community Hall, plus more allotments activity and more and bigger community events and festivals), it has been concluded that an additional staffing resource is needed. It will be necessary to define the job required and then calculate the cost to the council of that job (in terms of salary and on-costs). As that process is yet to be undertaken, a Staff Costs Contingency figure has been included in the initial draft budget for the financial year 2025/26.

Members were reminded by the Clerk (and RFO) that the Parish Precept, which is collected by the District Council as part of the annual Council Tax, is the amount required by a Town/Parish Council



of the households within the parish/town to meet any difference between income and expenditure in a financial year; to “balance the books”.

The Clerk (and RFO) informed members that

- the current Precept of Wisbech Town Council is £407,110 with a Council Tax Base of 6,602 (i.e. Band D equivalent properties in Wisbech); this equates to £61.66 for a Band D equivalent property
- in the UK, the national average precept in the current financial year is £85.88
- the total amount of money in Wisbech Town Council’s bank account at the end of the financial year 2023/24 had been £338,531.77. That total consisted of ear-marked reserves (i.e. money allocated by the council (or a third-party funder) to be used for a specific purpose) and general reserves (other money which is unspent as at the end of the financial year)
- the council’s ear-marked reserves as at the end of the 2023/24 (totalling £235,155) were:
  - (1) £112,282 for works to Wisbech Castle (the balance of the £150,000 loan which had been provided by Cambridgeshire County Council in 2018)
  - (2) £6,175 for additional Christmas lighting (the balance of the £20,000 allocated in the 2020/21 budget)
  - (3) £9,398 (balance of the £10,000) for set-up costs of the new pavilion at Wisbech Park
  - (4) £33,800 (received from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority) for the implementation of a new Shop Watch Radio Scheme
  - (5) £20,000 towards the cost of the Wisbech Town Council elections which were held in May 2023 (the unspent allocations in the 2022/23 and 2023/24 budgets)
  - (6) £53,500 to meet the cost of the highway works associated with the Wisbech Market Place enhancement scheme (minute MR2/21 refers).

Members were informed by the Clerk (and RFO) that the current situation with each of these ear-marked reserves is:

- (1) balance now stands at £110,039
- (2) reserve has now been spent (on replacing the Christmas lighting for North Brink)
- (3) £3,318 (balance of the £10,000) for set-up/equipment costs of Wisbech Park Pavilion and the St Raphael Community Hall
- (4) ear-marked reserve remains at £33,800. However, this committee decided, at minute R15/24, that implementation of a Shop Watch Radio Scheme be no longer pursued and that an application be made to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) for the funding which had been allocated to Wisbech Town Council for the implementation of such scheme to be re-allocated to fund the installation of a new electricity supply at Wisbech Park (to support the delivery of activities and events that benefit the community). The application has been submitted by the Clerk (and RFO) to the CPCA
- (5) reserve has now been spent
- (6) balance now stands at £12,969.

The Clerk (and RFO) informed members that the total of the council’s general reserves at the end of the financial year 2023/24 was £103,376.77 (£338,531.77 – £235,155). Since that time this committee had decided to utilise

- £10,707.51 of the council’s general reserves to fund part of the cost of the Wisbech Town Council elections which had taken place in May 2023 (minute R26/23 refers)
- £20,000 of the council’s general reserves to contribute towards the costs which had been incurred by Fenland District Council in pursuing a Judicial Review in relation to the Planning Inspectorate’s determination of the application for an incinerator in Wisbech (minute R28/23 refers).



The Clerk (and RFO) reminded members that the Practitioners' Guide to Local Council Governance recommends that a local council should possess, as general reserves, a sum equating to three to twelve months of its gross annual expenditure. Based upon the council's estimated gross expenditure for the financial year 2025/26, the minimum recommended level of general reserves for this council would be around £130,000.

Members were informed by the Clerk (and RFO) that

- the initial draft budget for the financial year 2025/26 requires an increase in the 2024/25 Precept of £407,110 (by £4,950) to £412,060 for the financial year 2025/26
- a total Precept of £412,060 equates to the Precept for a Band D equivalent property of £61.80 for the financial year 2025/26; an annual increase by £0.14 of the 2024/25 figure (of £61.66)
- an increase of £0.14 in the Precept paid by a Band D equivalent property (based on there being 6,667 such properties in Wisbech for 2025/26) (the number for the current financial year is 6,602) would equate to a 0% increase in the Wisbech Town Council Precept for 2025/26
- it is worth noting that more than 50% of properties in Wisbech are in Council Tax Band A; those households pay 6/9 of the Band D equivalent Council Tax/Precept
- every 1% increase in the current Wisbech Town Council Precept generates just over £4,000 in additional income to the council
- in his opinion, the council should aim to set a budget for the financial year 2025/26 which does not require using general reserves.

The Clerk (and RFO) responded to members' questions.

Councillor Hoy explained the need to increase the Events expenditure; firstly, the costs of delivering events increases each year and, secondly, the Town Council has expanded its annual programme of community events and festivals by adding a Rose Fair event (from 2024 onwards). She added that opportunities would be explored in terms of accessing funding from organisations such as Arts Council England, but it is necessary to have sufficient financial resources in place to be able to deliver the annual programme of community events even if third-party support cannot be secured.

Councillor Tierney commented that the local community asks the council to deliver certain things, such as an annual Rose Fair event, which, obviously, has financial implications for the council. He is, therefore, extremely pleased that it is possible for Wisbech Town Council to produce a budget for the financial year 2025/26 which does not require an increase in the amount payable by local taxpayers to the Town Council.

Members made no changes to the draft budget which had been produced by the Clerk (and RFO) and, hence, deem that there would appear to be no need for further discussion of this matter at the meeting of the Resources Committee scheduled for 13 January 2025.

Members decided, unanimously, on the proposal of Councillor Hoy, seconded by Councillor Tierney, that

- (1) the information presented by the Clerk (and RFO) be noted;
- (2) it be RECOMMENDED to 20 January 2025 meeting of Wisbech Town Council that that the draft budget for the financial year 2025/26 (which shows total expenditure of £521,760), requiring a Precept of £412,060 for that financial year, be approved;
- (3) the Clerk (and RFO) be congratulated on producing a budget for the financial year 2025/26 which enables the council to continue to deliver its services in a cost-effective, efficient and



effective manner but without requiring the Council Taxpayers of the town to pay more to Wisbech Town Council.

**R19/24 Storage of council assets**

Members considered the purchase or rental of a facility for the storage of assets that are used in association with the delivery of the council’s annual programme of community events and festivals.

Councillor Hoy made the point that because of the council delivering more and bigger community events and festivals each year, especially with adding a Rose Fair event to its annual programme, it has “outgrown” its current storage facilities. She expressed the opinion, with which there was concurrence by other members, that this situation could be addressed by the council either renting a storage unit from a commercial provider (which would incur ongoing costs) or purchasing a storage facility (a one-off cost).

Council officers had been investigating the costs of renting a storage unit and the Clerk (and RFO) reported to members thereon.

Members decided that

- (1) officers be delegated the authority to put in place arrangements for the storage of council assets, either a permanent arrangement (such as the procurement of an additional storage container) or a temporary arrangement (renting a storage facility from a commercial business) until such time as a permanent one can be achieved;
- (2) the sum of £2,000 be allocated for this purpose; to be met from the Market Place Promotion budget (of £3,000) for the financial year 2024/25, from which there has been no spending.

**Meeting finished at 8.05 pm**

Signed.....

Dated.....