

# Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting Held Wednesday 3rd January 2024 at 6:30 PM

Those present :

Chairman : Cllr P McCormack

Councillors : Cllr P Brougham, Cllr J Desmond, Cllr K Hughes, Cllr C Parker

Officers : S Larking, A Mc Intyre, K Spofforth

## 1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies received from Cllrs L Birchall and J Sayers

## 2 Declarations of Interest

All Cllrs living in Maghull declared an interest in Agenda item 6 (Budget Report 2024/25) as precept payers.

## 3 Public Participation.

1 member of the public in attendance. The Chair welcomed them to the meeting.

## 4 To Confirm the Minutes of the Last Meeting

The Chair asked for an amendment to be made to section 6 (Treasurers Report & Financial Statement) bullet point 6 which recorded key points from discussion about Hub. Minutes recorded that there was a perception that people outside Maghull and Lydiate were accessing the hub. This was challenged as inaccurate and it was requested that the wording be changed to reflect that there was a question about people outside of Maghull and Lydiate were accessing the Hub. Notes of meeting reviewed and record that there was a perception, not a question. Minutes to be submitted to next meeting as drafted.

**RESOLVED that the minutes of 19th July 2023 to be presented to next meeting.**

## 5 Treasurer's Report and Financial Statements

It was noted that the report provided a statement of account at November 2023 as background to the budget report for 2024/25.

Cllrs made the following key points:

- Increase in costs for BT lines. Finance Officer to contact BT to discuss upgrading 2 analogue lines
- Noted that new drinks machine was a one off capital costs.
- Noted that boiler costs for pump and valves not covered by warranty for new boiler
- Noted that start up costs for Hub higher than budgeted for. Want to understand what budget systems in place to manage and monitor the budget and contingency arrangements. Officers to check if contingency went back into reserves
- Seek feedback from those who delivered Christmas hampers to check that those receiving hampers met criteria
- Question about budget codes with no expenditure. Noted that this was because annual bills to be submitted before the end of the financial year
- Question about number and cost of mobile phones. Consider cheaper options e.g. dual sims
- Website development looks expensive. Noted that not at high end
- Insurance costs increasing

*pmc*

- Review layout of reports to include month of report and projected spend so that Members can see the direction of spend

In response officers made the following comments:

- The number of phones is due to lone working. Phone standardised to enable Grounds Maintenance Team to take photos when on site
- Website developers work with other Town/Parish Councils. Aware of what Parish/Town Councils need. Looking to expand site to include a membership area
- Have changed insurers. Use a broker who gets comparative costs. Costs significantly increased in 2023/24
- Drinks machine purchase allocated to Civic Hospitality as most appropriate budget code. Supplies to be allocated to miscellaneous (misc) expenditure. Can provide a breakdown of misc expenditure if required for probity.

### **RESOLVED THAT**

- 1. Officers to contact BT about cost of upgrading analogue phone lines**
- 2. Officers to provide information on what budget systems in place to manage and monitor hub budgets**
- 3. Officers to clarify if hub contingency want back into reserves**
- 4. Officers to seek feedback on hamper nominations and criteria**
- 5. Format of financial reports to be revised to include month of report and projected spend to the end of the year**
- 6. The report to be noted**

### **6 Budget Report 2024/25**

Members were informed that the report was the first opportunity to consider the budget for 2024/25 in advance of Full Council. The proposal sets out what is urgent to upkeep/maintain the estate. 2024/25 is the second year of a 3 year programme. The estate is tired; while there have been some upgrades in some play areas there are 12 play areas and 15 parks. And, there are issues with the fabric of the Town Hall including windows and roof. Funding of £153,345 has been identified to cover works required on health and safety grounds. Works to the roof are likely to cost £20,000.

Key points made by Cllrs

- Review priorities of projects e.g. could demolition of pavilion in Ballswood be a lower priority
- What do risk assessments say? What is the risk of doing nothing?
- Council been left in a difficult financial position. Reserves spent on Hub just before an election
- Previous administration didn't increase precept and didn't invest in estate. Now in a difficult/frustrating position
- Under investment means that money spent on projects e.g. the Hub rather than the roof.
- Moving forward with Hub as don't want to waste tax payers money. However, there has been no investment in the estate
- Not comfortable raising precept. Young working families are struggling and will be hit the most by increase and wont get any help
- Noted that precept not increased due to impact of Covid

*Pm*

- Noted that only doing highlighted projects (on page 24) would require an increase in precept of £6.98 and that an increase in precept was needed to meet inflation
- Noted that if no increase to precept the budget would only be able to fund upgrades to play equipment and leave a balance of £12,000
- Review income e.g. revenue from Venue. Noted that hope to increase revenue from hire of Activity Room
- Need to look at each budget line to identify efficiency savings
- Noted that monitoring paper usage and reviewing quality of paper would only make very small savings
- Between a rock and a hard place. Can't increase precept for residents. Need to be confident that all budgets reviewed e.g. Community Services includes "nice" but not essential things
- Look at posts again e.g. seasonal worker to make savings for health and safety projects. Its about reducing burden on precept payers. In 12 months time may be in a different position. Its responsible to cut things that are used to doing rather than need to do. In 12 months time may need to increase precept
- Report does not provide enough detailed information on budget lines and only presents one option. Look at what could be cut to make impact as small as possible
- Other Cllrs have known about projects and chosen to spend money on projects from reserves and on-going budgets. Overseen managed decline of estate and parks and prioritised vote winning projects
- Question about reserves and whether could use up to £20,000 to help reduce Precept increase
- More than one budget option to be presented to Full Council. Want to allow for residents financial situation to improve
- Consider delaying new vehicles; cut youth provision, magazine to go on line and look to reallocate resources for a year
- Concern that running 2 buildings Hub and Town Hall. Given the initial investment need to continue for 2 years (remainder of the lease) and then review
- Consider office staff moving to radio station pending work to roof over admin office
- Would like to see budget and spend/outturn profile for the last 3 years
- Happy to hold meetings with budget holders about savings and other income. Also, look at reserves
- Want increase as close to zero as possible
- Could look to Ward funds e.g. for park benches
- Want to see what Precept residents have been charged over the last few years to see the pattern
- MTC core services are parks and gardens
- Would be helpful to do some community consultation about precept/services
- Tough decisions to be made. Difficult times. If not this year, then need to look at impact for next year.
- Concern that timetable for issuing papers doesn't give much time to review budgets and make decisions about cuts
- Unclear what sum the budget(s) needs to be cut by
- Need to find a way for an affordable budget for the next 12 months
- Officers to prioritise projects (1, 2 etc)
- Clarify funding of play equipment and spent to date and if any work could be spread over a longer period

*Pma*

- Clarification sought about parcels of MTC land following valuation work

Officers responded as follows:

- In previous years Officers have recommended investing in estate and increasing precept (under £10 a year).
- Precept increased 3 times in 10 years
- Budget is as accurate/honest as possible. No wriggle room. Budgets been reviewed with managers
- Lease for Venue sets out terms for increasing rent and service charges. Lease doesn't take account of opening hours
- As required by Financial Regulation Officers are required to get 3 quotes to test the market. This was done for the coffee machine; printer/copier contract has been reviewed to make savings
- If get work done as proposed may be able to reduce precept in future years
- Advice is to keep 6 months of Precept in reserve. Could draw down reserves but some risks
- Sefton holding an initial budget meeting on 18 January
- Papers for Full (Budget) Council to be issued by 20 January. Papers to be ready by 11 January due to leave
- MTC need to inform Sefton about Precept by 5 February 2024
- Review of parcels of land identified 5 of 12 suitable to build on. Way forward is for MTC to apply for permission and sell with planning approval. MTC would need to pay for an architect to develop and submit plans. Could be unpopular. Would need to go to Full Council
- Display screen appeal dismissed. To check if Developers have any plans and any implications for MTC from initial contract

**RESOLVED that:**

- 1. Budgets to be reviewed with Managers to identify savings**
- 2. Share reports showing budget/spend over the last 5 years with Leader of Council and Chair of F&GP**
- 3. Provide a prioritised list of projects.**
- 4. Confirm spend on play equipment in current financial year and if costs for 2024/25 are new/additional.**
- 5. Provide details of precept over last 10 years.**
- 6. Check if developers have any plans for display screen as original application refused on appeal and any implications for MTC.**
- 7. More than 1 option to be presented to Full (Budget) Council**
- 8. The report be noted**

**7 Provision of Internal Audit Services**

**RESOLVED that:**

- 1. Invitation to tender for Audit services and timetable agreed**
- 2. The report be noted.**

**8 Chairman's Closing Comments**

The Chair thanked Officers for their hard work. Some further work and background papers required in advance of Full (Budget) Council.

*Paul*

It was noted that the Council did not have any Debtors.

Patricia McLemore 2/13/24

CHAIR

