



# FARNHAM TOWN COUNCIL

# B

## Notes

### Strategy & Finance Working Group

---

#### **Time and date**

9.30 am on Thursday 8th December, 2022

#### **Place**

Council Chamber - Farnham Town Hall

#### **Attendees:**

Members: Councillors Pat Evans (Lead Member), David Attfield, David Beaman, Carole Cockburn, Alan Earwaker (ex-Officio) and George Hesse

In attendance: Cllr Neale

Officers: Iain Lynch (Town Clerk), Iain McCready (Business and Facilities Manager), Lisa Tremeer (Communities and Administration Manager) and via Zoom (Rachel Aves (Neighbourhood Plan Advisor) and Jenny de Quervain (Planning and Civic administrator)).

#### **1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cllrs Mirylees and Merryweather.

#### **2. Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **3. Minutes of the last meeting**

Minutes of the meeting held on 14th October 2022 were agreed.

#### **4. Finance report**

Cllr Evans introduced the item and report at Appendix B to the agenda and said that the priorities would shape the budget, with a view to achieving a balanced budget. She referenced the Strategic Planning Workshop for Councillors which was held in November and the Working Group noted the issues emerging which were not in any specific priority order.

Councillors gave their views on the priorities and then discussed the details in the report and agreed

there needs to be continued support for the hardship fund and provision for services of young people.

Town Clerk explained the pressures on the budget which included:

- Energy costs and insurance costs. These have been increased in line with advice from suppliers but energy managed down in the estimates with the new more efficient boiler Having taken on more outside space from Waverley BC which resulted in the need for more resources.
- Staffing costs – the budget had provision for all staff being at the top of their pay grade (even though not all staff are on the higher pay level).
- A built in a cost-of-living increase of 4% which was a reasonable estimate for next year as inflation (CPI) is above 11%.
- Challenges of services being cut back by principal authorities (but FTC could top them up, although at this stage, levels were not known).

The Town Clerk outlined increase income opportunities to reduce overall deficit:

- Can move around reserves, need to be prudent.
- FTC has its community and environmental initiatives fund – reduced to £40k for 2023-24 to balance the budget more.
- Increased sponsorship potential
- Increased interest and dividends from investments
- Reduced areas that had been spent below budget in the previous financial year and were below expectations for 2022/23

Town Clerk added Council had agreed to provide extra support for young people, and this is reflected in the budget with additional funding for young people for the forthcoming year. There were some changes since the last strategy meeting, with a reduced deficit from around £130,000 to £108,000. The Working Group noted there was some flexibility in reserves which would be considered as part of the precept setting meeting in January.

At this point of the year 78% of the budget had been spent (until the end of November) and income was at 117.9% of budgeted largely- because of £219,000 of CIL income which would be ringfenced for specific projects and some additional contributions for the Support Fund.

Detailed notes on the draft budget at Annex 3 were noted.

The Town Clerk went through the detail of budget which was discussed in detail by the Working Group with the following issues noted:

- In 2022/23 the Income budget was £1,474,800 increased to £1,532,681 for next year whilst Expenditure would increase to £1,641,250 with a projected deficit of £108,569, assuming the precept level remained at the same figure with a precept income of £1,253,831.
- Increased sponsorship targets were questioned, but the Town Clerk explained that he believed they were achievable.
- Grants were shown as zero as there was no confirmation of receiving any specific grants for next year.
- The budget increase in allotments for next year (billed in October). Currently charge an admin fee of £50 for an allotment and not £40 as shown in the Budget Notes.
- Potential loss in income if gin festival does not go ahead – 1% of turnover.
- Banners: balance income and expenditure as cannot make a surplus from banners over highway.
- Council tax Support grant has now stopped.
- Water charges remain the same for now.

During the discussion about the figures and budget, it was noted that Waverley had reduced the collection rate to 98%. The Town Clerk explained that when Waverley made a surplus on the fund

(most years), the principal authorities share the surplus (not shared with the town and parish councils) but when there was a deficit this was only shared between the Principal authorities,

It was noted Christmas lights, would be put out for tender next year. Currently FTC owns the lights. The installation costs had been increasing as the LEDs lose brightness and need replacing every 3 years or so. There was a reserve fund of £50 000 for the lights and it may be that the lights would be leased in the next period. It was noted that the current cost included some £6000 a year to store the Christmas lights and a more cost-effective solution would be to purchase a moisture resistant container for FTC store them. It was agreed that this should be investigated.

**Action: Business and Facilities Manager.**

Following recent presentations by organisations with whom there were Service Level Agreements (SLA), there was a discussion about the amount of funding for grants. Cllr Hesse asked for clarity. (£2000 for small grants – people get up to £250 for in year applications, £17,000 divided by all the applicants on specific projects; and £72,000 for SLA recipients which could be for ongoing running costs.

It was noted that at the next meeting in January there would be a discussions recommending grants for 2023/24.

Cllr Beaman proposed that an additional sum of £2,500 should be added to the overall grant pot. This was agreed. The Town Clerk advised that the separate higher budget for Young People Services could also be used to assist with funding for Young people applications if required. It was also agreed that the overall grants pot should be shown in the draft budget as £75,000 with no specific allocations for individual organisations until the report was considered at the January meeting.

With the additional sum of £2,500 to the grants pot, it was agreed the shortfall would be increased to £111,069, and Council would need to consider at the Precept meeting whether to use a blend of reserves, additional income targets, or a precept increase. It was noted that if no reserves or additional income was included, the shortfall would cost a typical Band D property £6.18 extra per annum.

#### **Recommendation.**

**It is recommended that the budget for 2023/24 be set at £1, expenditure for next year be £1,643,750 (with draft income of £1,532,680 leaving a £111,069 shortfall at this stage).**

## **5. Reports from Task Groups**

- 1) Rachel Aves introduced the paper (circulated to all councillors) attached at Appendix C on the agenda, on the latest position on the proposed 'light touch' update of the Neighbourhood Plan to ensure it could retain its protection under Regulation 14. The Working Group noted that there were proposed changes expected in the National Planning Policy Framework which should assist, but currently sites not approved in the Neighbourhood Plan were going to appeal as Waverley did not currently have a five year land supply. The Minister Michael Gove had written to authorities outlining his plans but a written ministerial statement would have greater weight than an indicative letter.

Members noted that statutory consultees had been consulted and had no new evidence for inclusion in a review had been received.

Cllr Cockburn had referenced a number of other areas that had updated Made Neighbourhood Plans and these were being considered alongside advice from IPE, and Locality.

The latest position with the Waverley Local Plan Part II was noted, with only minor

modifications proposed by the Inspector, and Waverley were considering whether a Review of Part I would be beneficial.

It was agreed that a further update on the Neighbourhood Plan Review would be presented to the next meeting, along with comments on the Local Plan Part II consultation for agreement.

Members expressed concern at the recent Hawthorns appeal, noting that the Inspector sped through the appeal without considering all the elements considered important by the Town Council and an informal request had been made to the local MP to seek its Recovery by the Secretary of State.

It was agreed to **recommend to Council:**

- i) The advice note regarding options to review and update the Neighbourhood Plan be noted.**
  - ii) A formal request for the Secretary of State to Recover the Hawthorns Appeal in light of the anticipated changes to the NPPF be made.**
- 2) The Planning and Civic Administrator gave an update on progress on the Riverside Sculpture which had a large community participation in hammering the 105 sections which were now being fabricated into 21 cones. It was hoped the sculpture would be installed in March 2023.
  - 3) The Planning and Civic Administrator gave an update on the Conservation Areas Task Group and issues raised including advertising in the conservation area, (Regulation 7 relating to estate agent boards) and the article 4 Direction about which Cllr Hesse was asking a formal Question at the next meeting of Waverley's Council meeting. Cllr Hesse added information about fly tipping and confirmed that he was working to get rid of the bins in Dyas Yard and needed to identify the bin users to get the area tidied up.
  - 4) Town Clerk gave an update on the HR Panel which would be subject of a direct report to Council including:
    - i) The National Joint Council for Local Government Services had issued the pay agreement for 2022-23 following discussions between employers and unions. As this was a contractual entitlement, the HR Panel agreed for the increase in December to be backdated to 1<sup>st</sup> April under the scheme of delegation (Mayor, Chair of HR and Town Clerk in conjunction with Leaders)
    - ii) The Working Group agreed recommend to Council that future National Pay Awards should be implemented under the Town Clerk's scheme of delegation once Members had been informed.
    - iii) The Working Group congratulated Millie Sobey on her excellent progress in her apprenticeship and endorsed the decision to appoint her as Events Assistant with effect from March 2023.
    - iv) The Working Group supported the recommendation to Council for an additional day's leave for staff for the effort and achievements during 2022 to be taken between Christmas and the New Year, and noted the Mayor would invite the Outside Workforce team to a 'thank you' breakfast for their successes in the exceptional hot weather.

## **6. Contracts and assets update**

### **1) Hale Chapels Community Garden**

The Business and Facilities Manager gave an update on the Hale Chapels Community Garden Project

after visiting the site and explained there were two companies being considered to do the work. Officers had taken references and done due diligence, and both companies were considered able to do the work. On balance it was felt that with some additional project management requirements and the perceived need for an additional and contingency the contract would be awarded to Landform who had considerable experience in award-winning heritage projects. It was noted that the tenders included a provisional sum for the provision of water and electricity and the optional water feature was not priced in either contract.

Council had agreed that the decision on which company could be appointed be delegated to the Town Clerk in conjunction with the Assets Task Group, however it was felt under the circumstances Strategy & Finance should be involved in the decision. Members confirmed the desire to create a project for which the community would be proud. There was unanimous agreement to go with Landform at a cost of £164,473.

**Action: Business and Facilities Manager to advise companies of the outcome.**

## 2) Other updates

The Business and Facilities Manager updated the Working Group on other projects and confirmed that the West Street cemetery gates had been finished. Cllr Hesse asked about progress on the railings on the side and was advised that there was no definitive progress as agreement over the removal of the Leylandii on the right hand side needed to be reached.

He also confirmed the new CCTV cameras at the bottom of The Hart and Longbridge which replaced old analogue cameras had been installed and that replacement LED lights had been fitted on first and second floors of the office.

Cllr Hesse asked if Gostrey Meadow could be on the next meeting of the Assets Task Group. The Working Group noted that this was the expectation as there were a number of issues to be considered including the playground, café, toilets, gates and a request from the Farnham Croquet Club. **Action: Business and Facilities Manager**

## 7. Farnham Town Council Strategy Day

The Working Group reviewed the notes of the Council Strategy Day attached to the agenda at Appendix E. These were agreed for submission to Council and the proposed new structure attached as an Annex were **recommended for adoption by Council effective May 2023**.

## 8. Farnham Infrastructure Programme

- 1) Town Clerk advised the next date for the next Farnham Infrastructure Board meeting was set for Friday 16<sup>th</sup> December and confirmed he had, given the public interest in seeing the presentation and hearing the next steps, proposed that an alternate venue be used as the Council Chamber could be too small for this meeting and result in disappointment. However, the County Council preferred for it to go ahead as planned.

Cllr Beaman had asked Surrey County Council when the documents for the Board meeting would be available and was advised they would not be circulated until Monday. The Town Clerk said he was very disappointed that the documents had not been shared with officers ahead of the wider distribution, which gave very little time for consideration and was not a positive example of partnership working or of a Joint Board.

It was agreed that the Strategy & Finance meeting would be adjourned to 13<sup>th</sup> December in

order that consideration could be given to the anticipated documents ahead of Council.

- 2) Cllr Hesse raised an issue about the on-street parking surplus which should be spent for better materials in the Town Centre and Town Clerk suggested it could be raised in the board meeting on the 16<sup>th</sup> of December.
- 3) Way Finding: The Planning and Civic Officer gave an update on Wayfinding. Cllr Hesse asked about the finger posts being removed at the New Ashgate Gallery as they had put in ground boxes already for new signs. He felt they should not be allowed for conservation reasons and were not going to look right. It was agreed that Waverley should be made aware if not already.  
**Action: Planning and Civic Officer**
- 4) It was noted the East Street situation was a debacle with highways progressing things that did not fit with FIP and the proposals had a number concerns. Cllr Hesse raised the issue about the conservation area and Surrey County Council should be following the Management Plan requirements as a signatory. JdeQ confirmed East Street was not a feature on the FIP plans and they were trying to achieve small things to move forward. Members noted that the taxi rank appeared to have been removed from the plans and the quality of the materials had been reduced.
- 5) It was noted that a discussion on the Brightwells Bridge was scheduled for Friday 9<sup>th</sup>.
- 6) It was noted that the next Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan discussions were deferred until January.

## **9. Consultations**

Cllr Beaman indicated there was bus consultation which had implications in particular for the 65. He offered to draft some initial thoughts for a response, which was welcomed by the Working Group.

## **10. Town Clerk update**

Town Clerk gave an update on the co-option of a new councillor for the vacancy in Wrecclesham & Rowledge advising that five candidates had applied. At Council, each candidate would be asked to make a presentation for three minutes (in an order drawn by lots) and there would be a short time for succinct questions. At the end of questions voting would take place and the successful candidate would be the first to gain a majority of the votes of those present. Town Clerk confirmed he would write to each candidate to inform them of the process and the biographies would be sent to councillors ahead of the council meeting.

## **11. Date of next meeting**

The date for the next meeting was agreed as Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> January 2023 at 9.30am and a date to discuss the FIP Board meeting was agreed as Tuesday December 13<sup>th</sup> at 9.30.

The meeting ended at 1.24 pm

Notes written by Lisa.[Tremeer@farnham.gov.uk](mailto:Tremeer@farnham.gov.uk) and [Town.Clerk@farnham.gov.uk](mailto:Town.Clerk@farnham.gov.uk)



This page is intentionally left blank