

Yeovil Town Council



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Policy, Resources and Finance Committee

The Meeting... **Policy, Resources and Finance Committee**

The Time... **7.00pm**

The Date... **Tuesday 23 September 2014**

The Place... **Town House, 19 Union Street, Yeovil**

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QUALITY
TOWN
COUNCIL

Alan Tawse

Alan Tawse
Town Clerk

16 September 2014

To: All Members of the Policy, Resources and Finance Committee:

Martin Bailey

John Hann

Philip Chandler

Andrew Kendall

Bridget Dollard

Mike Lock (Ex-Officio)

David Dollard

Tony Lock (Chairman)

Tony Fife

Wes Read

Jon Gleeson

Darren Shutler (Vice-Chairman) (Ex-Officio)

Peter Gubbins

Alan Smith

Equality Act 2010

The *general* public sector equality duty places an obligation on a wide range of public bodies (including town and parish councils) in the exercise of their functions to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

The protected characteristics are:

Age

Race

Disability

Religion or Belief

Gender Reassignment

Sex

Marriage and Civil Partnership

Sexual Orientation

Pregnancy and Maternity

A G E N D A

Public Comment (15 minutes)

1. MINUTES

To confirm as a correct record the Minutes of the previous meeting held on 29 July 2014.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

4. CORRESPONDENCE

5. APPLICATIONS FOR GRANT AID

The Committee is requested to consider the separately circulated applications for grant assistance and, where any supported application will require a Service Level Agreement to be drawn up, to consider the matters to be included in the Agreement.

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Public Comment (15 minutes)

6. CAPITAL FUND

Introduction

A copy of the Capital Fund is attached at page 6. The sum of £5,503 is currently available for allocation to new capital schemes.

Former Goldcroft Allotment Site

Future sources of funding include the proceeds arising from the sale of surplus land at the former Goldcroft allotment site.

In November 2009, the Town Council agreed that approval be given to the acceptance of the highest bid received for the disposal of the above site subject to the bidder providing formal satisfactory evidence within the next two weeks of their ability to fund the acquisition.

The response was reported to the following meeting of the Town Council at which it was agreed that the disposal to the highest bidder be permitted to proceed.

The disposal of the site proceeded as expected and, following completion of the S.106 agreement, the Planning Authority issued a planning certificate on 23 July 2010 granting outline planning approval for the residential development of the site. In accordance with the agreed disposal arrangements, a draft contract was prepared by the Town Council's solicitor and submitted to the purchaser's solicitor.

Following on from the March 2011 Town Council meeting, the outstanding issues were progressing towards a conclusion and, as reported to the October 2011 Town Council meeting, contracts were expected to be exchanged at the agreed price in the near future whereupon it was anticipated that the purchaser would apply for detailed planning consent or reserved matters approval within the following two months.

The position was reviewed at the February 2012 Town Council meeting, at which a strategy was agreed to resolve the outstanding issues. The disposal arrangements were further reviewed by the Town Council in May 2012 and a revised plan of action drawn up to advance the matter.

The conclusions of a Working Group set up to review the disposal of the land; to consider future options and to make recommendations on the best way forward were considered at the September meeting of the Town Council and unanimously approved, and a further report was submitted to last December's Town Council meeting.

The report set out further developments that had taken place regarding the disposal of the above land following the adoption of a strategy by the Town Council, and details of the progress made in relation to the course of action agreed at the September 2012 meeting of the Town Council were set out in the report along with copies of the bids received to date in response to the recent marketing exercise.

Following detailed consideration of the bids received and the options available, the Council agreed that no action be taken, at this stage, to dispose of the site, and that the land continue to be marketed and an update report be submitted to the March 2013 meeting of the Town Council.

In March, the Town Council received an update report and, after giving careful consideration to the options available, adopted a revised strategy that would progress the matter whilst protecting the Council's interests. An update report was submitted to the Town Council in May at which it was agreed that the land be withdrawn from the market pending the outcome of the ongoing planning process.

The application to renew the outline planning consent and the reserved matters application have since been approved by the Planning Authority and, following discussions with the Council's Property Agent and Solicitor, the options for taking this project forward were considered at the April 2014 meeting of the Town Council at which it was agreed that the land be re-marketed. This will be undertaken in the near future following which details of the bids received will be submitted to the Town Council.

Former Ski and Activity Centre

Another potential source of funding is the former ski and activity centre should the Town Council decide to dispose of the freehold as part of the redevelopment proposals.

Alder King were instructed to market this site on behalf of the Town Council and, following a meeting between the appointed representatives of the Town Council and Alder King, arrangements were made for a revised draft development brief to be produced and submitted to the July 2008 meeting of the Town Council for consideration. The final brief was adopted at that meeting and the property was marketed and expressions of interest invited.

Details of those received were reported to the Town Council in March 2009, and Members approved a process for assessing these bids and reporting back on their respective merits with a view to a final decision being taken by the Town Council in due course on how best to proceed.

All expressions of interest received were considered by the Steering Group set up to give initial consideration to the matter, and details of the bids received along with their views were submitted to the Town Council.

Although the bid put forward by the Yeovil Community Church in September 2009 for the redevelopment of the site as a creative arts centre was supported in principle, the proposal was unable to be progressed at that time owing to factors beyond the Church's control.

In May 2010, the Town Council agreed to concentrate on remarketing the property following a review of the current development brief, which were submitted for Members' consideration following the conclusion of the planned investigation by the Council's Property Agent.

The result of this exercise was reported to the October 2010 meeting of the Town Council at which approval was given to Alder King entering into discussions with representatives of the organisation commissioned to prepare an indicative masterplan for the nearby urban village - as part of the emerging Core Strategy (Preferred Options) - with a view to exploring the feasibility of the site being included in the masterplan.

The outcome of these discussions was reported to the December 2010 Town Council meeting at which it was agreed that representations be made to the Planning Authority seeking the inclusion of the site in the emerging masterplan for the nearby urban village. Representations were made and, as reported to the January 2012 Town Council

meeting, the site has been included in the masterplan, copies of which have been circulated to all Members.

Further feasibility work is planned, and further updates awaited on the progress of the future actions. The Town Council will be involved in the planned further feasibility work on the ski slope site.

In the meantime, the proposed development of Yeovil Summerhouse Urban Village has been identified as a strategic location in the emerging Local Plan (Policy YV4) which, if included in the adopted Plan, will strengthen the case for its future delivery at that location.

Other Sources

Any funding beyond these sources will need to be in the form of a loan from the Public Works Loan Board, applications for which are considered on their individual merits and subject to funding availability.

Play Areas

The District Council has been asked to consider the suggested phasing of proposed future upgrades having regard to the condition of the play equipment at all of the sites managed by the Town Council and the availability of contributory funding from the District Council.

This work, which was completed last year, involved a further audit of the play areas by the District Council's Play and Youth Facilities Team and the results - including an analysis of the findings and suggested priorities – were reported to the March 2013 meeting of the Committee (Minute 8/167 refers) along with the views of the Grounds and General Maintenance Committee on the matter.

A copy of the updated programme is set out below:

Play Area	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	Totals
Preston Park	£12,500						£12,500
Summerhouse View		£10,000					£10,000
Kingston View			£7,750				£7,750
Grass Royal				£10,000			£10,000
Fielding Road					£5,000		£5,000
Turners Barn Lane						£10,000	£10,000
Total	£12,500	£10,000	£7,750	£10,000	£5,000	£10,000	£55,250

These figures represent the anticipated contributions from the Town Council and assume that matching contributions will be made by the District Council.

Allocations have been made by both Authorities for 2012/13 (Preston Park) which was completed last December, and the Policy, Resources and Finance Committee has identified how the Town Council will meet its proposed contribution of £10,000 towards the 2013/14 scheme (Summerhouse View). This will be via a combination of savings totalling £10,000, which have been carried forward as a planned underspend to 2014/15.

The Town Council's proposed contribution is subject to the District Council making a matching contribution towards this scheme, and confirmation has been received that this funding is in place. Now that all of the necessary funding has been secured, the project will be undertaken in 2014/15.

The Committee has also agreed to the funding of the remainder of the programme being considered as part of the budget - setting process leading up to the fixing of the 2014/15 precept. However, given the slippage in the delivery of the agreed schemes, this can be considered as part of the 2015/16 budget process.

Existing Programme

As previously reported, the Preston Park project was scheduled for delivery in 2013 and, in line with this aim, the project was completed and officially opened last December.

In addition to the £12,500 each contributed by the Town and District Councils, S106 contributions amounting to £5,463 were secured from a local developer towards the Preston Park project, along with a contribution of £5,000 from Cllr Dave Greene who agreed to allocate part of his County Councillor delegated health and well-being budget, which enabled an enhanced scheme to be delivered at that location. A contribution of £1,500 was also secured from the Well-Being of Yeovil Association, which made a total overall working budget of £36,963.

A project plan and sketch designs for the play area were agreed by the Grounds and General Maintenance Committee, and a steering group was formed to help deliver this project – in consultation with the local community. Following a tendering process, a contractor was appointed to deliver the agreed scheme within an agreed timetable.

A similar approach is being taken with the development of the Summerhouse View project now that all the necessary funding has been put in place, and a steering group has now been set up and has met to oversee the development and delivery of the project.

The Steering Group is currently carrying out a consultation exercise with local residents and the project is expected to be delivered during the present financial year.

General Reserve

As previously reported to the Committee, the General Reserve stands at £385,947 and, after taking into consideration agreed carry forwards totalling £50,631 from 2012/13 and other commitments totalling £91,628, the net unallocated balance is £243,688.

The Committee has agreed that, as a matter of policy, a minimum balance of £180,000 remains uncommitted in the General Reserve to meet any unexpected revenue needs beyond those which could be funded from contingencies over the forthcoming financial year. This is £63,688 (35%) *above* the agreed minimum balance.

Recommendations

Members are **RECOMMENDED:**

- (1) to note the position concerning the Capital Fund and the General Reserve; and
- (2) to note the current position regarding the rolling programme of play area improvements.

(Alan Tawse, Town Clerk - 01935 382424)

7. **INTERNAL AUDIT – 2013/14**

The qualified independent internal auditor appointed by the Committee has undertaken and completed an internal audit of the Town Council for the financial year 2013/14.

The work has been carried out in accordance with Regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2011 which requires relevant bodies to undertake an adequate and effective internal audit of its accounting records and of its system of internal control in accordance with the proper practices in relation to internal control.

This helps to protect the Council as it manages risk, by ensuring that the systems of financial and other controls are appropriate and fit for purpose.

I am pleased to report that the Internal Auditor has issued the Council with a signed annual return drawn up in accordance with the Guidance on Governance and Accountability for Local Councils in England (published by the Joint Practitioners' Advisory Group) and the CIPFA Code of Internal Audit Practice.

The return confirms that all of the control objectives were being achieved throughout the financial year to a standard adequate to meet the needs of the Council.

A small number of minor coding and VAT adjustments were identified during the audit, which have been implemented. This year's accounts were prepared after these adjustments were made.

The Committee is **RECOMMENDED** to note and welcome the successful completion of the 2013/14 Internal Audit.

(Alan Tawse, Town Clerk – 01935 382424)

8. AUDIT OF ANNUAL RETURN - 2013/14

The External Auditor's report on the 2013/14 Audit of Annual Return has been received. This report replaces the annual audit of accounts following previously reported changes in local council audit procedures.

This year, the external audit has again been undertaken by Grant Thornton UK LLP – Chartered Accountants, who are based in Bristol and who have been appointed by the Audit Commission as the Town Council's external auditors for a period of five years.

I am pleased to report that the report confirms that the information contained in the annual return is in accordance with the Audit Commission's requirements and that no matters have come to their attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met.

Whilst it is recognised that the Town Council already follows proper practices in the appointment of its Internal Auditor and in setting and responding to the programme of work that he/she undertakes, it is suggested that this be formally recorded in an appropriate document. The suggested wording is set out below:

The council shall ensure that there is an adequate and effective system of internal audit of its accounting records, and of its system of internal control in accordance with proper practices. Any officer or member of the council shall make available such documents and records as appear to the council to be necessary for the purpose of the audit and shall, as directed by the council, supply the RFO, internal auditor, or external auditor with such information and explanation as the council considers necessary for that purpose.

The internal auditor shall be appointed by and shall carry out the work in relation to internal controls required by the council in accordance with proper practices.

The internal auditor shall:

- *be competent and independent of the financial operations of the council;*
- *report to council in writing, or in person, on a regular basis with a minimum of one annual written report during each financial year;*
- *to demonstrate competence, objectivity and independence, be free from any actual or perceived conflicts of interest, including those arising from family relationships; and*
- *have no involvement in the financial decision making, management or control of the council.*

The Committee is **RECOMMENDED**

- (1) to note and welcome the successful completion of the 2013/14 External Audit; and
- (2) to include the above-outlined suggested wording in the Town Council's Annual Risk Management Strategy.

(Alan Tawse, Town Clerk - 01935 382424)

9. FINANCE WORKING GROUP

For the past thirteen years, the Committee has appointed a Working Group to assist with the preparations for the annual budget exercise.

The Working Group has in the past met in October after officers have prepared draft budgets based on an analysis of the first six month's income and expenditure in the *current* financial year and a review of the outturn of the *previous two* financial years.

This ensures that the latest information and trends are taken into consideration by the Working Group in forecasting the Council's budget requirements for the *following* year.

The proposed remit of the Working Group is as follows:

To help develop the Council's capital and revenue funding and expenditure plans, and to make recommendations on such matters to the Policy, Resources and Finance Committee

As in previous years, it is also proposed that the Working Group reviews the current financial control policy and develops a strategy to guide committees on how to approach the 2015/16 budget-setting process.

Last year, the Committee appointed the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman of the Committee, Martin Bailey, Bridget Dollard and Peter Gubbins to serve on the Working Group.

The Committee is **RECOMMENDED** to consider the arrangements for re-appointing the Working Group for the forthcoming budget exercise and to approve its proposed remit.

(Alan Tawse, Town Clerk – 01935 382424)

10. NALC LARGER LOCAL COUNCILS' CONFERENCE

Details have been received of this year's National Association of Local Councils (NALC) Larger Local Councils' Conference and Exhibition, which is being held in London on Wednesday 3 December 2014.

The chosen theme is "Future Local", and the organisers have indicated that delegates will have an opportunity to learn how larger local councils will look in the future in terms of putting communities in control of local assets, delivering local services and exerting influence over decision-making and priorities.

Confirmed speakers include Rt Hon Oliver Letwin MP – Minister for Government Policy in the Cabinet Office. In addition, there will be five interactive workshops on the following themes:

- Our Place! Programme
- Neighbourhood Planning
- General Power of Competence
- Community Cohesion
- Sharing Practice and informing NALC's work

The cost of attendance is £195 per delegate, which includes lunch, plus travel.

The Committee is **RECOMMENDED** to consider whether the Town Council should be represented at the Assembly and, if so, to determine upon its representation.

(Alan Tawse, Town Clerk – 01935 382424)