

WIRKSWORTH TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Finance Buildings and Personnel Committee held 9 December 2024

FBP24/60 Present: Cllr A Clamp (Chairman), Cllr P Carr, Cllr E McDonagh, Cllr A Jordan and Cllr C Whittall
In attendance: Paul Jennings (Town Clerk)

FBP24/61 Apologies for Absence: Cllr A Pollock

FBP24/62 Variation in Order of Business: to take item 7 Budget 2025/26 after item 9 Town Hall Maintenance.

FBP24/63 Members' Pecuniary Interests in Agenda Items: None

FBP24/64 Minutes:

The minutes of the meeting of the Finance Buildings and Personnel Committee dated 10 November 2024 were confirmed as a correct record.

FBP24/65 Monthly Budget Balance

The clerk provided a line by line review of expenditure and income (we are 2/3 of the way through the financial year).

REC that the clerk contact those tenants that are in arrears and request that any deficit be addressed, those tenants that regularly fall behind in rental should be asked to move to standing order to avoid further issues with rental arrears.

FBP24/66 Community Meeting Space Request

Safer Roads for Wirksworth are requesting meetings space under the community meetings space scheme.

REC that the request be granted, commencing in January 2025.

FBP24/67 Town Hall Maintenance

The clerk reported that there were a number of maintenance issues related to the roofs, including a leak in the clock tower that resulted in damage to the clock tower atrium ceiling, an adjacent building owner has reported loose roof flashing on the curtilage of the Town Hall and the anteroom wall/ceiling has sustained water damage.

REC that the internal works be addressed by caretakers where possible, the clerk contacts the roofer who has previously worked on the roof to schedule a repair.

FBP24/68 Budget 2025/26

It was acknowledged that the proposed budget includes cuts to discretionary spending wherever possible.

However, the lack of housing growth within Wirksworth compared to other Derbyshire Towns means that the precept/band D costs borne by residents will be proportionally higher than other Towns as the increasing costs are not being mitigated by increasing housing stock (unlike Matlock, Ashbourne, Belper etc).

For the Town Council to support services within the Town, the proposed precept increase will result in a rise of 21p per week for a Band D house in the parish.

The Town Council continue to supplement its income through leases and occasional lettings of its facilities (compared to adjacent towns, this represents a far more significant proportion of the Council's income). In the case of leases, market conditions have meant that these have not increased (for example, the library lease has remained unchanged for a decade, and it could be argued that the Town Council are providing a subsidy of this service, to ensure its continued future).

There was much discussion regarding the level of reserves held by the council. Informal guidance is that reserves should be commensurate with the potential liabilities of a council, it is considered prudent to hold greater reserves when a council hold large assets such as old buildings or where it relies on additional income streams separate to the precept (both are true for WTC). It is generally recommended that as a baseline reserves should be 50% of the proposed yearly expenditure for a smaller Parish Town council.

The past few years have seen repeated use of the reserves to fund repair works to the council buildings (e.g. Clock Tower, Library Façade, Atrium Roof) and facilitate the Meadows Project.

The budget includes a very modest £5000 contribution to reserves in 2025/26 to start to rebuild these.

Concern was flagged about the ongoing large one-off costs that occur most years in regard to the maintenance of the Town Council assets – especially the Town and Memorial Halls. This has previously been discussed during budget discussions and it has already been proposed that there should be a review of the council assets, the obligations and costs that arise from these.

REC that a precept of £253000 be set in 2025/26, which allows a balanced budget including a contribution of £5000 to start rebuilding reserves.

That a reserves policy be formalised when the end-of-year accounts are presented to council in May 2025 so that a coherent and informed strategy can be developed for future budgets.

The meeting closed at 7:35 pm

Chairman