

Snodland Town Council – Policy and Finance Minutes

23rd November 2023

Committee Members in attendance:	(C) Miss V Lawrence, (VC) D Lettington, Mrs Sue Bell, Angus Bennison, Paul Hickmott, Ms D King, Mrs V Barker, W Mallard
Non Committee Members in attendance:	Cllr G Miners
Committee Members Absent with apologies:	
Committee Members Absent without apologies:	
Council Staff Present:	Mrs K Sowten (CEO)
Members of the public:	

1.	<u>Apologies for absence</u> see above
2.	<u>Declaration of Interests</u> None
3.	<u>Minutes - To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 19th October 2023</u> The minutes of the meeting held on the 19 th October 2023 were agreed as a true record.
4.	<u>Questions from the Public</u> <i>Pursuant to Standing Order 3 e & g Members of the public may make representation, answer questions and give evidence at a meeting which they are entitled to attend in respect of the business on the agenda. A member of the public shall not speak for more than 3 minutes</i> There were no members of the public present
5.	<u>Audit Trail to be given by a Councillor</u> Cllr Mrs King completed an audit trail which focused on the CEO workload and how it is currently untenable. Recruitment has been included in the budget for 2024/25. The Chairman advised that the Approved Contractors list has been added onto the Audit Spreadsheet. A copy of the report is available on file.
6.	<u>Financial Review</u> <u>6.1 Income and Expenditure Report.</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A copy of the financial review was sent out to members of the committee prior to the meeting, a copy is available on file. • The Committee noted that the annual cost of living pay rise had been agreed by the NJC and had been paid to the staff, including back pay from April 2023 in their November pay. • One query was raised regarding the staff training budget and that there is a considerable amount unspent. The CEO advised that training is

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	<p>currently being looked at; one day first aid training for staff members and Mental Health First Aid training for the CEO.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost Code 4155/270 Cricket Pavilion Utilities is way under budget on spending and it was requested that this is investigated and reported on the next financial review. <p><u>6.2 Expenditure under delegated authority</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Committee received a report on Delegated spending by the CEO, which was discussed and agreed. A copy of the report is available on file. <p><u>6.3 Aged Debtors</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The committee reviewed the aged debtors. The Committee were aware of one significant debt which was discussed at previous meetings under confidential items. The remaining balances were discussed and accepted. <p><u>6.4 Earmarked Reserve and Capital Reserve Balances</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Committee received a report on the balances relating to Earmarked and Capital Reserves, which gives an overall view of the reserve balances.
7.	<p><u>To consider the first draft budget for 2024/25</u></p> <p>The Committee received the first draft budget, a copy is available on file. The Committee considered the highlighted major changes reflected in the 2023/24 budget which included</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional staffing for Admin and Ground Staff. • A 10% increase to account for inflation. • Electricity contracts due for renewal in December 2023 with a reduction in cost from last year. One gas contract due for renewal in December after a 3 year contract, this has a significant increase. • The Snodland Partnership Grant has been removed again this year. • The Cemetery income is always a challenging area to predict in the budget. It was suggested to look at the last 5 years and base on an average over that period. • No consideration has been given in the budget for any new projects during 2024/25. Any works will need to be taken from the councils General reserves. • Vehicle EMR has been reduced to £6000 per year <p>This leads to an increase in the precept from £334255 to £354210 (5.97% increase). The level of band D equivalent during the current year 2023/24 is £84.70 with its tax base of 3946.34. The 2024/25 tax base has yet to be confirmed by TMBC and therefore the increase is based on the current year 3946.34. The Council should be mindful that the tax base can reduce dependent upon discounts and exemptions, or increase dependent upon new houses built, however early indications are that there will be no change in the tax base.</p> <p>2023/24 £334255/3946.34 =£84.70 2024/25 £354210/3946.34 =£89.76 - An increase on band D properties of £5.06.</p>

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	<p>Due to the high levels of Election reserves it was RECOMMENDED that the EMR figure for Election reserves could be reduced to £1000 per year.</p> <p>There may be some opportunities for Councils or residents to apply for grants. This maybe something that can be explored and reported back to council or signposted to the individual residents/groups.</p> <p>Other areas that could be considered if the council are looking to make cuts are the amounts spent on events run by the town council. This is not just a financial burden, but also puts huge additional pressure on the staff.</p> <p>It was RECOMMENDED that an Agenda item is brought to the next Amenities and Recreation Committee. This would give members an opportunity to make suggestions on how future council events are run.</p> <p>RECOMMENDED that a further draft budget is presented at Full Council with adjustments made to the election reserves, any increases that are advised to the council regarding increases plus adjustments to the Cemetery Fees.</p>
9.	<u>Correspondence</u>
	THE COMMITTEE HAS AGREED That in view of the business about to be transacted, it is advisable in the public interest that the press and public be Temporarily excluded and they are instructed to withdraw.
10.	<u>To receive an update relating to the new Brooklands Café Lease.</u>
	The Committee received an update on the progress of the new lease for Brooklands Lake together with a request for a rent free period.
1141	RESOLVED to offer a rent free period of 3 months at Brooklands Lake Café for the new tenant.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 20:32