

Town Council
28th January 2019 at 4.00pm

Present: Councillors: K Wattingham
D Abbott
J Carroll
Ms L Ellaway (arrived 4.07pm)
D Dixon-Wilkinson
Mrs Y Farrell
Ms J Hillyard
M Kennedy
Mrs T McMahan
C Slough
AS Swain
Mrs S Thorne (arrived 4.05pm)
T Welch

Officers: Clare Evans Town Clerk
Louise Senior Head of Democratic Services

Public: 0

9758 APOLOGIES

None.

9759 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

A member of the public asked through Cllr Dixon-Wilkinson: A member of council had named a member of the public to the external investigator. Can this member of the public be informed of the identity of the councillor who made the allegations, and can the member of the public be informed when they can meet with Mr Brown? There was some debate over this, however no definitive response was provided.

9760 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

9761 2019/20 BUDGET AND PRECEPT

At the meeting on 21st January 2019 Members were requested to consider and approve a budget and precept for 2019/20. It was highlighted that there was an omission on the schedule of ear-marked reserves which would have a bearing on the budget and precept. As such no decision was made and this further meeting was requested.

Members were requested to refer to:

- Officer Draft Budget as previously circulated;
- Summary of Movements of Earmarked Reserves (EMR) for 2018/19 - Revised
- Predicted Summary of Movements of Earmarked Reserves (EMR) for 2019/20 - Revised

The predicted spend and draft budget was based on ongoing projects, standard revenue items of expenditure, on aspirations included in the Vision and on officer recommendations.

The officer draft budget as previously circulated did not include a figure for the precept.

Members were advised that the opening balance of General Reserves at 1st April 2018 was £513,362. The correction of the EMR schedule to reflect the council decision to transfer into an EMR £200,000 for new office provision from General Reserves had been made within 2018/19.

There was a predicted overspend in 2018/19 of expenditure over income of approximately £40,000. This related to many variances within the budget between the budgeted amount and the predicted spend although of particular note was the variances associated with cost centre 191, Personnel / Staff costs.

Accordingly, the figure for General Reserves was predicted to be £273,362 at 1st April 2019.

It was recommended for the council to have a level of general reserves between 3 and 9 months expenditure. Based on average monthly expenditure levels in 2018/19 of £91,250 this equated to between £273,750 and £821,250.

As the predicted level of general reserves was within the lower range of the recommended amount it was suggested that members should seek to agree a balanced budget, namely where income matched expenditure.

The officers budget as presented to the meeting on 21st January included for capital and revenue items of expenditure which totalled £1,188,974. Income sources, aside from the precept, total £82,207. This gave a next expenditure figure of £1,106,767.

If members would be minded to seek to keep the Band D equivalent figure the same as in 2018/19 (£175.40) the precept would be £861,916. To set a balanced budget, members would therefore need to identify savings of £244,851 (£1,106,767 less £861,916) from the Officers Budget or increase the use of EMR's within the budget or a combination of both. It was not recommended that EMR be used to offset items of revenue expenditure as it was usual for such costs continue into subsequent financial years, thus maybe creating budget difficulties at later dates.

Members received some suggestions and recommendations to this effect. These recommendations had been incorporated into a Revised Officers Draft Budget and into the schedules of EMR's.

Members were requested to note officers' concerns over the heavy use of EMR within this Revised Officers Draft Budget. Whilst they had been used largely to offset capital items of expenditure, historically the council has annually made provision for this level of capital expenditure. This may cause difficulties at future budget setting periods.

Alternatively, members may decide to increase the precept beyond £861,916. This would impact by increasing the Band D equivalent.

Praise was extended to the Town Clerk for the work that had gone into producing the budget, which had proved to be a difficult task.

Members discussed the options of cutting back on spending or raising the precept, however, members were mindful that within Houghton Regis there were many families classified as the working poor.

It was noted that staff salaries were the largest expense, cutting staff wages or staff jobs was suggested. It was clarified that staff were contracted to be paid in line with NJC scale.

It was requested that the members budget be circulated with annotations with justifications of certain areas within the document, as areas of the document was unclear.

Members requested an adjournment.

Meeting adjourned at 4.47pm, meeting reconvened 5.14pm

Members discussed redundancies, and suggested if income was not increased by housing, redundancies could be made long term. Some members suggested that staff could have a pay freeze on any pay rise. Members were reminded that staff were contracted to be paid in line with NJC scale including any nationally agreed pay increase.

Concerns were raised that some figures were inaccurate on the members budget.

A further adjournment was requested.

Meeting adjourned at 5.40pm, meeting reconvened 5.46pm.

Members voted to approve the officer's budget;

Proposed by: Cllr Kennedy Seconded by: Cllr Swain

A recorded vote was requested:

Members for: Cllr Swain, Cllr Kennedy, Cllr Welch, Cllr Slough, Cllr Dixon-Wilkinson
Members against: Cllr Abbott, Cllr Carroll, Cllr McMahon, Cllr Ellaway, Cllr Thorn, Cllr Farrell, Cllr Abbott.

Accordingly, the officer's budget was not approved.

A amendment was proposed:

To defer the budget 2019/2020 to a future meeting.

Proposed by: Cllr Hillyard, Seconded by: Cllr Abbott.

Members voted on the proposed motion:

A recorded vote was requested:

Members for: Cllr Farrell, Cllr Thorn, Cllr Hillyard, Cllr McMahon, Cllr Carroll, Cllr Ellaway, Cllr Abbott.

Members against: Cllr Kennedy, Cllr Swain, Cllr Welch, Cllr Dixon-Wilkinson, Cllr Slough.

Accordingly, the amendment was carried and became the substantive motion.

Members voted on the revised motion.

A recorded vote was requested:

Members for: Cllr Farrell, Cllr Thorn, Cllr Hillyard, Cllr McMahon, Cllr Carroll, Cllr Ellaway, Cllr Abbott.

Members against: Cllr Kennedy, Cllr Swain, Cllr Welch, Cllr Dixon-Wilkinson, Cllr Slough.

An amendment to recommendation 2 was proposed to read:

To approve a precept for 2019/20 of £861,916 which maintains the Band D Equivalent at £175.40.

Proposed by: Cllr Hillyard Seconded by: Cllr Carroll

Members voted for the amendment.

A recorded vote was requested:

Members for: Cllr Farrell, Cllr Thorn, Cllr Hillyard, Cllr McMahon, Cllr Carroll, Cllr Ellaway, Cllr Abbott.

Members against: Cllr Kennedy, Cllr Swain, Cllr Welch, Cllr Dixon-Wilkinson, Cllr Slough.

Accordingly, the amendment was carried and became the substantive motion.

Members voted on the motion;

A recorded vote was requested:

Members for: Cllr Farrell, Cllr Thorn, Cllr Hillyard, Cllr McMahon, Cllr Carroll, Cllr Ellaway, Cllr Abbott.

Members against: Cllr Kennedy, Cllr Swain, Cllr Welch, Cllr Dixon-Wilkinson, Cllr Slough.

Resolved: 1) To defer the 2019/2020 budget to a future meeting;
2) To approve a precept for 2019/20 of £861,916 which maintains the Band D Equivalent at £175.40.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 6.00pm.

Dated this 25th day of March 2019

Chairman

DRAFT