

## Finance & Governance Committee

**Present:** Cllrs Chapman, Goodman, Hitchin, Maslen and Pitt.

**Absent:** Cllr Banks, Cooper-Marsh, Collins, and Kumar

**In attendance:** Town Clerk, Responsible Finance Officer

**Minutes** of the meeting of the **Finance & Governance committee** held on **Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> December** at **7.15pm** in the Eaton's Centre, The Maltings, St Neots, PE19 8ES.

### Public Participation

There were no member of the public present.

### ACTIONS

**080 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Cllrs Cooper-Marsh and Collins.

Admin

**081 Declarations of Interest**

Cllr Pitt declared and interest in agenda items 15 and 18 as a cabinet member at Huntingdonshire District Council. Cllr Pitt would not take part in any votes related to these items.

**082 Minutes**

**RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 19<sup>th</sup> November 2024 as a true and accurate record.

**083 Payments**

Members received and noted payments for October 2024.

A Member raised a query on the cancellation of Christmas events due to bad weather and whether the Council had incurred costs on the cancellation which would be covered by bad weather insurance. The Town Clerk would investigate this with the Events and Communications officer and report back to the next meeting of the committee.

**084 Bank Cash and Investment Reconciliations**

Members received and noted bank cash and investment reconciliations as at 31st October 2024. The Responsible Financial Officer commented that there is currently £3,000,000 in the CCLA higher interest savings account as of October 2024.

**085 Budget Setting 2025-2026**

i) Members received and considered a report from the Priory and Eatons General Manager on 2025-26 budgets. The General Manager explained that income and expenditure was reviewed for the Priory at New Street resulting in increased income targets and lowered resource costs through rota reviews. The need to trade for a full year requires looking at different and new income streams, including room hires.



The General Manager explained that the income from the café is a significant increase from the café in the Priory Centre, with income varying day to day but with particularly higher income at weekends. Part of the rationale for running the facility is to support community groups while also given a way to train and develop new processes and procedures as part of establishing a move to the refurbished Priory Centre.

A Member thanked officers for their work in reducing costs. The key to this was embracing the development of business and practices for the newly refurbished Priory Centre. This should include developing solid food offerings and piloting and embedding menu designs ready for the new facility. Developing the market strategy is key to this.

A query was raised over how much hot food was served on average during a week. The General Manager explained it varied day to day but that we do have the tools to analyse this and adapt the menu and offering to the data and profit margins.

- ii) Members received and considered the draft 2025/26 budget and recommend a proposed budget to the Full Council.

Proposed and seconded that the draft 2024-25 budget and precept is recommended to the Full Council.

A Councillor commented that an increase of 2.6% average Band D increase is higher than would have liked but is lower than other Councils and reflects the resources required to continue to deliver services, including new service delivery around youth provision.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** the proposed budget and precept for the financial year 2025/26 and to confirm a precept of £2,480,266.

#### **086 Museum Internal Lighting**

Members received and considered a recommendation from the Operations and Amenities Committee to approve up to £3,000 in unbudgeted expenditure from the Community Buildings earmarked reserve for the replacement of lighting at the building leased to St Neots Museum.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that the Council approve up to £3,000 in unbudgeted expenditure from the Community Buildings earmarked reserve for the replacement of lighting at the building leased to St Neots Museum.

#### **087 Jubilee Garden**

Members received and considered a recommendation from the Operations and Amenities Committee to approve £9,571 in unbudgeted expenditure from the General Reserve for works to future protect the jubilee mosaic.

A Member explained that there had been some concerns over the costs, but the works that are to be done will benefit the garden as a whole as well as the mosaic and

proposed the recommendation be amended to state it will be an improvement to the garden.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that the Council approve £9,571 in unbudgeted expenditure from the General Reserve for works to future protect the Jubilee mosaic.

**088 Flood Leaflets**

Members received and considered a request from the Environmental Project Officer for the release of earmarked funding for further distribution of the Town Council's Flood Preparedness leaflet.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that the Council approve £791.20 in funding from the Flood Prevention earmarked funds for the production and delivery of further flood awareness leaflets to properties in St Neots.

**089 Town Council Offices**

Members received and considered a request from the Deputy Town Clerk for unbudgeted expenditure for security at the Steve Van de Kerkhove Community Centre building temporarily housing the Town Council offices.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that the Council approve £3,860 in unbudgeted expenditure from the Council's general reserves installation of a CCTV camera and monitoring system at the Steve Van de Kerkhove Community building which is in use as temporary Town Council office space.

**090 Professional Fees Revenue Budget**

Members received and noted a report from the Town Clerk on likely over expenditure in the current year's professional fees budget. Further reporting and monitoring will be brought back to the next meeting of the committee in January 2025.

**091 Eaton Socon Children's Playing Field is due on 31 January 2025**

Members received and considered the Charity Commission annual return Eaton Socon Children's Play Field, for which the Town Council is trustee. **RESOLVED** that the Responsible Financial Officer submit the annual return in line with Charitable Commission deadlines.

**092 Financial Regulations**

Members received and considered recommended amendments to the Financial Regulations on the use of Council credit cards, which would allow the assistant operations manager to be authorised to use a credit card.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that the Council approve the amendment to the Financial Regulations to permit a council credit card to be issued to the assistant Operations Manager.

**093 Credit Card Policy**

Members received and considered a draft Credit Card policy guiding the use of Council credit cards by officers.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that the Council adopt the draft Credit Card policy which sets out procedure and guidance for the use of Council credit cards by officers.

#### 094 **Priory Centre Redevelopment**

Members received and considered scheme costs received from Huntingdonshire District Council and its appointed contractor for the Priory Centre redevelopment project. The Town Clerk introduced the reports and shared an email communication he had received from HDC Project Officers ahead of the meeting.

Members discussed at length the information provided, the costs of the redevelopment scheme and confirming a Town Council contribution.

Discussion included the following points;

- Members noted that budget constraints following the start of the return of quotes for specific items and that value engineering would be required to bring the scheme within budget.
- The information provided does not give detail on what is to be delivered as part of the scheme in the available budget. Therefore, it is not clear what the project will deliver for the Town Council's contribution.
- There are unknown costs associated to ensuring the building can operate and deliver a quality service from the start, including theatre tech, AV equipment, kitchen equipment and furnishings. It is not clear what is still in the scope of the budget available and what isn't, for which the Town Council will need to consider funding as building operator.
- The information provided on areas which could potentially be value engineered was out of context and difficult to define what the implications would be for the delivered project; more information was needed on this.
- There needs to be greater understand on the impact of choices made in value engineering and the Town Council needs to be involved in those decisions. A concern was raised on value engineering elements that can't easily be added back into a future scheme or works on the building.
- The Town Council could be seen to have three options, the first being not to make a contribution to the scheme and for a reduced overall project to be delivered. The second to confirm commitment of our funding at an agreed level which must include all elements the Town Council as a tenant would need to deliver a quality operation from day one, such as equipment, furnishings etc. The third, that the Council commits its funding to the building project to deliver a scheme while acknowledging there are additional costs for equipment and furnishings that it will need to fund as operator.
- Members spoke of the challenges in committing CIL funding and the need to be more involved with cost decisions. The Council can't get directly involved



in the procurement process, but could make requests for the specific information it needs to make decisions.

*21:17 Cllr Maslen left the meeting.*

*21:21 Cllr Maslen rejoined the meeting.*

It was proposed and seconded that the Committee recommend that the Council is minded to commit its funding to the Priory Centre Development project, subject to detailed information been provided to the Full Council meeting on December 17<sup>th</sup> on costs of the scheme and what is included within that budget, including specifications on AV equipment, what is not deliverable in the budget which the Town Council will need to fund to ensure the venue is operational, and assurances that St Neots Town Council will have sign off of value engineering decisions through the Building Development Group.

The proposal was put to a vote and failed. Cllr Pitt abstained having declared an interest.

*21:36 Cllr Pitt left the meeting.*

095

**RESOLVED** to suspend standing orders and continue the meeting for a further 10 minutes.

Proposed that the Council increase its contribution to the redevelopment on the basis that it is match funded by Huntingdonshire District Council and that the budget delivers all aspects of the scheme which might otherwise be lost in value engineering.

The proposal was not seconded.

096 *The meeting was suspended at 21:50 and no further items of business were discussed*

097 **Priory Centre Lease**  
Item not discussed.

**COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON**