

**BRIDGNORTH TOWN COUNCIL****Minutes of the Finance Committee Meeting of Bridgnorth Town Council held in the Annexe, College House on Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023 at 6.45pm.**

**Present:** Councillors D Cooper, N Cooper (Chair), R Ireland and K Sawbridge

**In Attendance:** Mrs C Turner, Town Clerk  
Mrs R Williams, RFO

Councillor A Chetter, as a member of the public

**Absent:** Councillor J Buckley

**FCM43/2324 WELCOME**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**FCM44/2324 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Members received the following apologies:

Councillor E Marshall      Travel issues

**FCM45/2324 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were declared.

**FCM46/2324 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

No public questions had been received.

**FCM47/2324 MINUTES**

It was proposed by Councillor D Cooper, seconded by Councillor K Sawbridge and unanimously

**RESOLVED:** to approve the minutes of the Finance Committee meeting held on Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> August 2023.

Councillor D Cooper asked if the Cyber Insurance had been procured. Members were informed that this had been done.

**FCM48/2324 MEMBERS QUESTION TIME**

There were no members questions.

**FCM49/2324 VAT PARTIAL EXEMPTION 2022/2023**

Members noted that the calculations for the VAT Partial Exemption position for 2022/2023 had been completed by DCK Accounting Solutions. The VAT recovered on the exempt activities for the year was £3,357.98 which had not exceeded the de-minimis limit of £7,500.

**FCM50/2324 EARMARKED RESERVES**

1. Members reviewed the report below with regards to the breakdown of EMRs held by the Town Council.



EMR	Amount outstanding £	Comments
321 CIL	37,401	This EMR is ringfenced against specific expenditure related to the impact of development. Currently, it is intended that the slow accumulation of funds here will be used to offset expenditure to increase burial capacity, be that buying extra land or digging up some of the roads to turn it into burial space. Monies have been spent from this EMR in recent years on improvements in the Cemetery: creation of additional burial space and resurfacing of internal roads.
325 Property/ Infrastructure/ Projects	70,882	This is an amalgamation of several separate EMRs that previously existed. Possible intended uses/expenditure: Upgrade of Christmas lights, replacement equipment, street lighting, Severn Park maintenance, Lavington Gardens maintenance, resurfacing of internal footpaths in Castle Grounds, DLF training etc etc
327 Cemetery Land	48,403	Town Council contribution to cemetery land purchase project
328 Grants	8,680	Historic Grant funding ring fenced for a specific purpose – originally a bus stop on Whitburn Street but amended to include repairs to other bus stops maintained by the Town Council.
331 Elections	12,500	Savings pot for 4 yearly elections
334 LJC Grant – Youth Partnership	1,516	Ringfenced Funding held since before 2014 for the LJC which now no longer exists. The Internal Auditor has advised that NALC will need to be contacted with requires to the disposal of these funds.
337 LJC Grant - Events	2,190	Ringfenced funding to purchase community equipment for events ie: staging.
338 Arts Trail	7,613	Ringfenced funding for specific purpose.
339 S106 Gym	145	Residue of ringfenced funding for play/exercise equipment.
341 Community Safety	2,778	Residue of ringfenced funding (not our money) following the disbandment of the Pubwatch scheme several years ago.
342 Local Plan Consultation	2,968	This follows a Town Council resolution to support a community group to develop a Town Plan and respond to the Local Plan Consultation - the Council can easily redirect this funding.
343 Marches Grant Funding	13,314	Please see report FR/08/2324.



345 Mayoral Allowance - Unspent	0	This can be recredited to the General Reserve at the end of the FY as it is the unspent balance of the previous Mayor's Fund.
346 Committed Funds at each Year End	0	This is the balance of funding set aside as a result of a number of accruals from the previous year's accounts. Any residue at year end can be returned to the General Reserve.

The Town Council also hold Useable Capital Receipts in the sum of £172,632.85.

Useable Capital Receipts have some limitations on how they might be used. Light touch advice from the Internal auditor recently stated "Funds which derive from the proceeds of disposal of capital assets (usually land and buildings) exceeding £10,000 are posted to a Capital Receipts Unapplied reserve and they can only be used for capital expenditure or the repayment of borrowings. The legislation actually states: 'a capital receipt, or the balance of a capital receipt, to which this regulation applies may only be used for one or more of the following purposes —

- (a) to meet capital expenditure;
- (b) to repay the principal of any amount borrowed; or
- (c) to meet any liability in respect of credit arrangements, other than any liability which, in accordance with proper practices, must be charged to a revenue account".

The Chair commented that there appeared to be very little scope to use any EMR's in support of the wall project.

Members discussed the EMR 327, Cemetery Land. A project was started some time ago to look at purchasing new land for which an option to buy agreement was set up. This has now lapsed. Councillor D Cooper stated that the CIL neighbourhood fund of approx. £50K can be used for this purpose. The project, as a whole, was put on hold as grounds works were completed that created extra burial space. Members agreed that this EMR should remain as this was a known project for future years.

It was commented upon that EMR 325, Property/Infrastructure/Projects was a little lean. It is known that large items of plant are needed.

## 2. Members considered a report with regards to EMR 343 – Marches LEP Grant Funding.

In July 2020 the Town Council received funding of £20,000 for the enabling of the safe re-opening after Covid-19, social distancing, driving footfall and reinvigorating the town economy.

The remaining balance stands at £13,314.38.

Shropshire Council were contacted, following the initial spend, to confirm if part of the remaining monies could be spent on street scene items: painting of our Victorian style lamp posts around Castle grounds and the railings by the car park and entrance to Castle Grounds. No response has been received.

The Deputy Town Clerk has since contacted them again asking if the remaining monies can be spent and on what.



It was proposed by Councillor N Cooper, seconded by Councillor D Cooper and unanimously **RESOLVED**: to delegate to the Deputy Town Clerk/RFO the task of following up on the previous requests.

#### FCM51/2324 QUATERLEY BUDGET REPORT

Members were asked to consider and discuss the half yearly budget report to September 2023.

The RFO explained to Members that at this stage and, taking into account the current situation with regards to known operational circumstances, it is felt that the budget is on track and looks to be in a good position at the ½ yearly stage.

#### FCM51/2324 BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR FY 2024/2025

The Committee began their initial discussions surrounding the setting of the budget for FY 2024/2025 after being provided with a subjective analysis report from the RFO.

Members were mindful that a precept increase of 13% or £20.25 which was implied by the draft budget was likely to be unacceptable. Members noted that that figure did not take account of the increase that would be necessary to fund the retaining wall project.

The report was looked at the detail, line by line, and Members asked for the following changes to be made, for both income and expenditure, to the draft budget that had been presented:

<b>Income</b>		
1000 – Lettings	College House/Annexe/Castle Hall/Severn Park	Increase to £25,400; last year's budget figure
1050 – Recharge	Bridgnorth Community Hall	Apply an inflationary increase (CPI)
1100 – Cemetery Fees		Increase to £45,000; last year's budget figure
1450 – Car Park Fees	Severn Park car park	Increase to £93,000
<b>Expenditure</b>		
4185 – Equipment	All areas	Reduce to £3,000 (take out photocopier purchase)
4204 – Tree Management	All areas	Reduce to £8,000, the current budget

Detailed discussions took place on several issues.

- Market fees- impact of increasing them by inflation (CPI)
- Car park fees – these were last revised in 2022 and general inflation has been running at around 17% since that revision. Members asked the RFO to look at the fee structure at Severn Park and bring back proposals to increase revenue by around 20% (reflected in the figures above)
- Members noted that staffing costs consumed around 65% of the gross budget. The Town Clerk was asked to review the staffing structure and identify any service implications of any possible savings.
- The potential to reduce the grants budget to 1% of the previous year's precept instead of 2% which is the current position. (Saving £7,000)



The RFO is to speak with the Property Manager with regards to the budget for property repairs. A new nominal code is to be created; General Property Repairs, with all current budget lines being transferred.

The RFO is to present a new draft budget to full Council at the November meeting for discussion.

END: 20.10

DRAFT