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**Minutes of meeting**

**MEETING:** Finance and Governance Committee

**DATE & TIME**: Wednesday 16 December 2020 at 7.00pm

**PLACE:** Zoom online meeting

**Present**

**Councillors**

Cllr Gray (C) Cllr Barrow Cllr Harris

Cllr Wheller Cllr Huckle (VC) Cllr Lambert

Cllr Legg Cllr Nickinson Cllr Wakeling

Cllr Taylor Cllr Hamilton Cllr Northam

**Officers**

Jane Biscombe (Town Clerk)

Matt Ryan (Deputy Town Clerk)

Ian Milne (Business & Finance Manager)

Tony Hurley (Operations Manager)

Tara Williams (Parks & Open Spaces Manager)

Charmaine Denny (Contracts & Facilities Officer)

Ed Warr (Town Centre Manager)

Niki Ayles (Democratic Officer)

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| F0134 | **Welcome by the Chair**  Cllr Gray welcomed those in attendance.  Cllr Gray explained that the Committee would be trialling online voting for the first two items on the agenda. Voting for the remainder of the items will be via a show of hands. |
| F0135 | **Apologies for Absence**  There were no apologies for absence and so not vote was held. |
| F0136  F0137 | **Declarations of Interest**  There were no declarations of interest.  **Minutes of the last meeting**  **Resolved:**  Proposer: Cllr Harris Seconder: Cllr Gray  Councillors voted unanimously to agree the minutes of the last meeting held on 11 November 2020 as a correct record and these will be duly signed at the earliest opportunity. |
| F0138 | **Councillors Questions**  There were no Councillors questions. |
| F0139 | **Public Comments and Questions**  There were no public questions and no members of the public present. |
| F0140 | **Draft Budget and Precept**  Ian Milne introduced the item as detailed in the agenda documentation and explained that, prior to the meeting, he had circulated an amended Appendix A to notify Members that the tax base figure received from DC is 18062.7, a reduction of 5.2 from last year. As a result, WTC needs to make a slight adjustment and increase the contribution from reserves by £970 which allows the Band D Equivalent amount to remain the same as the previous two years at £185.69 per annum.  The precept WTC will be asking within its demand notice will be £3,354,060.  Within Appendix A there is also a minor adjustment to two beach budget lines which is a change from the original Appendix A. The RNLI budget has been increased by £5k to introduce lifeguards earlier next year to provide full safety cover for Easter 2021 when it is reasonable to expect that a spike in domestic travel will take place due to the first public holiday with little or no COVID restrictions. However, it is anticipated following further analysis on previous years data that there will also be additional income generated by introducing seasonal charging on deckchairs (if approved) therefore the net cost to the budget of both of these amendments is zero.  With regards to the catering kiosks, it is intended that proper trading accounts will be put before the Finance and Governance Committee for consideration as part of the budget monitoring process.  It was highlighted that this is the second year in a row that it is being proposed that here is a 0% increase in the precept, and that the Council will achieve its initial reserve of £900k by the next financial year.  Cllr Northam referred to the budget and said that some include staff costs whilst others do not, and this makes it difficult to judge whether there is a net gain or loss each year. An example of this is the allotments service.  Action – Cllr Gray and Ian Milne to look at including more detail in the payroll budgets.  Cllr Barrow felt that it was positive that the Council is in a position to recommend no increase to the Council Tax precept and asked Ian Milne whether there was anything he wished to draw Members attention to in the budget in terms of things not working out as had been hoped.  Ian Milne responded that there are no areas that he is particularly concerned about, and budgets have been built up on a robust basis and from experience. In terms of risk, there are a lot of factors that affect income budgets. However, expenditure budgets are more within the Council’s control and there are none that he is particularly concerned about.  Cllr Nickinson proposed that, in what has been such a difficult year for many people in Weymouth, Full Council should have the opportunity to consider a reduction in the precept and reduce the amount being transferred to reserves. Additionally, he was concerned that, in terms of the Council’s green agenda, the wrong message is being sent out by increasing allotment charges. Cllr Nickinson felt that allotment charges should remain unchanged for this year.  Ian Milne explained that the Council is putting aside £300k to build up reserves to the minimum amount that auditors are looking for, and the Council would be criticised if that was cut in order to reduce Council Tax. However, it is always within Members’ gift if they wish to increase the amount from reserves to support the budget. It would not normally be recommended as a transfer to reserves is usually for one-off expenditure which is removed the following year. £30k is already being transferred from reserves this year in order to ensure that Council Tax can be maintained as it is.  Ian Milne informed Members that if they were minded to increase the transfer from reserves in order to reduce Council Tax, for every £18062 transferred, the reduction in Band D Council Tax would be £1.  Cllr Nickinson highlighted that a transfer from reserves of £180k would reduce Band D Council Tax by £10.  Ian Milne advised that, from an Officer perspective, there are regulations to follow and advise on. Officers would not be able to support the amount suggested by Cllr Nickinson from a regulatory point of view and it is a practice that is not acceptable from an accountancy perspective. Additionally, there is no legal timescale in which the Council has to meet its minimum level of reserves, but it has been agreed with both internal and external auditors that it will be done over 3 years.  Jane Biscombe stressed that a reduction in reserves or a departure from the agreed Council process for building general reserves could put the Council at risk of criticism and possible audit implications from both internal and external auditors in the future. It is within Members’ gift to make whatever decision they feel to be best for the Council however this would be against Officer advice.  There was no seconder for Cllr Nickinson’s proposal therefore there was no further debate.  Cllr Lambert suggested that one way in which a sub-zero percentage increase in Council Tax could be achieved is through Members not accepting their allowance, and this is within their gift if they wished. He felt that this year Members have not had the same need for expenses. Cllr Lambert proposed that this goes to Full Council so that all Councillors can have a say.  It was felt that some Councillors may still need to receive the allowance due to their personal circumstances and that if the Council was to do this, then money should be set aside to pay for things like child care for those who have to attend meetings.  Jane Biscombe explained that WTC has launched a legal challenge to the government on the subject of the payment of carers expenses. This was scheduled to be determined by the Government in June however, due to Covid, this has not happened. It is currently illegal for Town Councils to pay for childcare, which is different to district and borough councils, hence the legal challenge has been launched. WTC has been backed by NALC and town and parish councils up and down the country but, unfortunately, is currently unable to pay for childcare.  Cllr Wheller felt that if Councillors do not wish to accept their allowance then they only need to inform staff and it won’t be paid.  Cllr Wakeling felt that, whilst the allowance is modest, it is an enabler in terms of getting more young people involved in the Council.  **Resolved:**  Proposer: Cllr Lambert Seconder: Cllr Northam  Members voted by a majority of 6 in favour, with 4 against and 2 abstentions, that Full Council should consider whether or not Members, voluntarily or otherwise, take their allowance.  This will be put before Full Council for consideration at its next meeting on 13th January 2021.  Cllr Hamilton felt that the issue of Council Tax support needs re-examining as the government needs to ensure that Councils have the funding to continue to offer support to those who are struggling to pay. Cllr Hamilton proposed that the Full Council make this request in writing.  Cllr Gray highlighted that the Chancellor announced a £0.3bn fund to help Council’s support the collection rate, and suggested that WTC should formally ask DC whether they have applied for government grants and what the percentage is in Weymouth so that it is known how much money DC is getting to support Council Tax in the town. Additionally, the government should be asked to review policy on taxation and consider not taxing local Council Tax payers but have a fairer tax system completely.  Action – Jane Biscombe to draft a letter within the next week and circulate to Cllr Gray, Cllr Harris (Leader) and Cllr Wakeling (Deputy Leader) for agreement.  **Fees and Charges:**  **Allotments:**  Members debated whether the fee for allotments should be increased.  Tara Williams expressed that she would like to research what other local authorities are charging and requested that Members allow her time to do this. It was proposed that there is no increase to allotment charges, pending a review by Tara Williams. This was not seconded and therefore was not carried.  **Resolved:**  Members agreed by a majority of 10 in favour, with 1 against and 1 abstention, to increase allotment fees by the amounts detailed in Appendix B.  **Cemeteries:**  **Resolved:**  Members voted unanimously in favour of increasing cemetery fees as recommended in Appendix B.  **Parks and Open Spaces, Commercial Road, and Advertising Drums:**  **Resolved:**  Members voted unanimously in favour of increasing the above fees as recommended in Appendix B.  **Beach Tents, Events and Festivals, and the Beach and Esplanade:**  Cllr Northam highlighted that WTC makes a net loss on events and that includes staff costs, and wondered whether the market would bear any increase in WTC’s costs.  Matt Ryan suggested that the word “from” be added in front of any fees and charges for events. This would then give officers the opportunity to negotiate dependent on the size of the land, scale of the event, and other things taking place.  Cllr Gray felt that the word “from” means that the responsibility passes back to officers as to what will be charged for events. No Members disagreed with this way forward.  Cllr Taylor highlighted that charity events appear to be have a higher increase in fees than commercial and non-commercial events.  Action – Tony Hurley to explore Cllr Taylor’s query regarding the increase in fees for charity events.  **Resolved:**  Members voted unanimously in favour of increasing the fees as detailed in Appendix B.  **Public Conveniences:**  Cllr Northam proposed that the Swannery toilets should be made free to use.  It was highlighted that the fees for public conveniences took £6k last year.  **Resolved:**  Proposer: Cllr Northam Seconder: Cllr Legg  Members voted by a minority of 5 in favour, with 7 against, of the Swannery toilets being made free to use. Therefore, the motion was not carried.  **Resolved:**  Members voted by a majority of 7 in favour, with 4 against and 1 abstention, to increase the fees for public conveniences as detailed in Appendix B.  Members then returned to the five recommendations detailed in the agenda documentation.  Jane Biscombe highlighted that members allowances would be removed from the recommendation as Members had already voted for members allowances to be debated at Full Council as per Cllr Lambert’s motion.  **Resolved:**  Members voted unanimously in favour to:  1) Approve and recommend to Full Council the proposed budgets for 2021/22  2) Approve the proposed fees and charges for 2021/22 subject to any amendments the Committee wishes to make.  3) Recommend that an amount of £45,000 be set aside in reserves from the projected current year underspend to fund the work in respect of the asset review.  4) Recommend to Full Council on 13 January 2021 a precept for 2021/22 of £3,354,060. |
| F0141  F0142  F0143  F0144  F0145  F0146  F0147  **F0148**  **F0149**  **F0150** | **Town Councillor Vacancy Policy**  Jane Biscombe introduced the item as detailed in the agenda documentation.  **Resolved:**  Members voted unanimously in favour of recommending the policy to Full Council for adoption.   1. **Cleansing and Waste Contract Review**   Matt Ryan introduced the item as detailed in the agenda documentation.  **Resolved:**  Proposer: Cllr Legg Seconder: Cllr Barrow  Members voted unanimously in favour to agree to a Cleansing & Waste contracts review.  **Resolved:**  Members voted unanimously in favour of nominating Cllr Lambert (Green & Clean Working Group), Cllr Nickinson and Cllr Barrow (F&G Committee) to work with officers on this review of the council’s waste and cleansing contracts requirements, and for Cllr Northam to identify a volunteer from the Services Committee.  **Grant Applications**  Jane Biscombe introduced the item as detailed in the agenda documentation.  **Resolved:**  Proposer: Cllr Legg Seconder: Cllr Harris  Members voted unanimously in favour of awarding the full amount requested of £579.  Jane Biscombe highlighted that WTC continues to promote the availability of grants to community organisations and groups, and a considerable amount remains in the budget.  **Health, Safety & Welfare Policy and Home Working Policy**  Matt Ryan introduced the item as detailed in the agenda documentation.  **Home Working Policy:**  Cllr Wakeling explained that the Home Working Policy had been circulated to himself and Cllr Roos as Chair and Deputy Chair of the HR Committee. However, because there is no HR Committee meeting for a couple of months, he was happy for the policy to come to this Committee.  Cllr Northam asked whether it is the intention for the Commercial Road office to re-open so that staff are encouraged to work as a team, or whether staff would be allowed to remain at home for permanent home working.  Jane Biscombe explained that the policy is not a Covid specific policy although it contains detail regarding rules that could be put in place for emergency reasons. The policy is for a more normal time. It has clearly been demonstrated that the Council is very able to function well from home working and she has been impressed with how well staff have adapted to home working. They have the skills and drive to make home working a success. Where it fits with the Council’s need, and where there is management agreement, staff can work up to two days at home and the remainder in the office. She added that the value of home working and office working needs to be recognised as some officers find it beneficial and would like it to continue. The policy seeks to strike a happy medium between the two. However, the arrangement has to work for the Council as a business.  Additionally, flexible working will allow for better use of the Commercial Road offices. There are a number of new staff joining the Council and there will be a need to make best use of that space through means such as hot desking. However, she would like to see the office staffed between certain hours, as it was pre-Covid 19.  Cllr Harris was concerned that there was not more flexibility in the policy. Cllr Legg highlighted that paragraph 3.3 of the policy states that “In general the Council will be supportive of employees working up to 2 days per week from home as long as core business needs are met, and that the employee can meet all the requirements of their role from home”. Therefore, the policy is not saying that 2 days is the limit.  Cllr Gray felt that it needs to be left to SMT to make these decisions as they are the best people to do so.  **Health Safety and Welfare Policy:**  Cllr Gray referred to point 4 of the Health, Safety and Welfare Policy and highlighted that Tumbledown Farm is not mentioned. However, as it is owned by WTC and given that it is a farm, he feels that it should be included in the policy.  Action – Matt Ryan to amend the policy to include Tumbledown Farm.  **Resolved:**  Members voted unanimously in favour recommend the policies as attached at appendix E and F to Full Council for approval.  **Modern Slavery Statement**  Rosie Osborne introduced the item as detailed in the agenda documentation.  **Resolved:**  Proposer: Cllr Wheller Seconder: Cllr Harris  Members voted unanimously in favour of the Modern Slavery Statement at Appendix G being adopted and used as a guide to understand and actively develop strategies to combat modern slavery.  **Project Initiation Document – Digital Screens Pilot**  Ed Warr introduced the item as detailed in the agenda documentation.  Concerns were raised regarding the potential for the digital display screens to be vandalised. However, it was felt that Weymouth needs to move forward with the times even though vandalism may happen.  *Cllr Wheller gave her apologies as she needed to leave the meeting at this point.*  Members were reminded that they are considering a Project Initiation Document with a proposal that the project is taken forward and the research undertaken by Officers.  **Resolved:**  Members voted unanimously in favour to  a) agree to the production of the Project Plan for the Digital Information Screens Pilot Project;  b) instruct officers to apply for advertising consent as detailed in the report.  **Information Items**  **Attractions Tender Update**  Charmaine Denny introduced the item as detailed in the agenda documentation.  Charmaine Denny confirmed that, of the 4 concessions informally contacted, only 1 has confirmed that they wish to extend for a further season. 2 others are not interested and 1 has not responded.  Approximately 13 people have expressed an interest in taking on an attractions concession.  Action – Charmaine Denny to make a renewed effort to contact the 1 concession holder who has not responded, giving a deadline for them to responded, after which time the matter can be considered closed.  **Tenant Support Update**  Charmaine Denny introduced the item as detailed in the agenda documentation.  There were no questions from Members.  **Catering Services Mobilisation Update**  Charmaine Denny introduced the item as detailed in the agenda documentation.  Interviews for the role of Catering Supervisor will be taking place tomorrow.  **Actions from previous meetings**  Cllr Gray provided a verbal update regarding his action points.  In respect of the town centre, Cllr Gray has spoken at length with Cllr Ferrari about what DC can offer in terms of a vision for the town centre, and has also spoken to Cllr David Walsh (Economic Lead, DC), who is happy to attend a briefing session. Cllr Gray has not yet had the opportunity to speak with Cllr Clare Sutton (DC) but will be doing so. Cllr Gray and Cllr Huckle have met with Cllr Harris to focus the Town Centre Management Group on those things that they can affect. The Town Centre Management Group can inform the Council of other things that need input from DC but, predominantly, it will focus on things that WTC owns or maintains, or wants to see an improvement in.  Cllr Gray has discussed with Cllr Harris how the visioning process for the town centre might be moved forward. Unfortunately, a lot of what happens in the town centre is outside of WTC’s control. Cllr Ferrari has indicated that some planning laws could be relaxed to allow more residential use and more zoning. However, DC is not willing to get involved where private landlords are concerned.  **F&G Forward Plan**  There were no Councillor questions regarding the Forward Plan.  Jane Biscombe highlighted that a motion will need to be raised in order to extend the meeting beyond 10pm, and Members may wish to specify a certain amount of time rather than extending the meeting indefinitely.  *Cllr Barrow gave his apologies as he needed to leave the meeting at this point.*  **Resolved:**  Proposer: Cllr Wakeling Seconder: Cllr Harris  Members voted by a majority of 9 in favour, with 1 against, to extend the meeting by 30 minutes.  **Nothe Kiosk: Proposed Renewal Terms**  Tony Hurley introduced the item as detailed in the agenda documentation.  **Exclusion of press and public**  **Resolved:**  Members voted unanimously in favour of excluding the press and public at this point in order that the Committee could move into confidential session.  **Confidential Item – Nothe Kiosk: Proposed Renewal Terms**  **Resolved:**  Proposer: Cllr Legg Seconder: Cllr Harris  Members voted unanimously in favour to:  a) agrees the award of a new lease for the Nothe Refreshment Kiosk in accordance with the head of terms set out in Appendix J;  b) instruct officers to seek to negotiate a new lease in accordance with either Option A or Option B as set out in Appendix I, with a rent review after 5 years dependent on which option is negotiated;  c) agree that in the event that neither Option A nor Option B is negotiated, then delegated authority is given to the Town Clerk to agree a lease on terms comparable with the current lease**;**  d) delegate the decision on the level of rent to the Town Clerk on the basis of advice of an independent valuer;  e) agree that, following the setting of the rent for the first year of the lease, the annual rent increases will be calculated in line with any increases in the retail prices index (RPI) over the twelve months prior to the 1st day of November in the preceding year plus 1%. |
|  | The meeting closed at 10.19 pm. |