

CHESHAM TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES of the meeting of the FINANCE COMMITTEE

held on 7 November 2022

Councillors:

Councillor Simon Booth (Chair)
Councillor Alan Bacon
Councillor Jane Macbean
Councillor Wilford Augustus

Councillor Umar Hayyat
Councillor Francis Holly
Councillor Joseph Baum

In attendance:

Tony Marmo
Kathryn Hallet
Ade Fashade
Georgina Fernandez

Chief Executive Officer
Head of Corporate Services
Interim Democratic Services Officer
Democratic Services Officer

29. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Paul Harding.

30. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

31. TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON THE 7th SEPTEMBER 2022

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved and noted.

32. FINANCE COMMITTEE ACTION TRACKER

The Committee noted the progress being made on the action tracker. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) updated the committee that action on signing the Council up to an energy tariff had stopped as no fixed tariffs are being offered that are below the Energy Price Cap currently. More information on the Council's options once the price cap stops might be available around January/February 2023.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note progress being made on the Finance Committee Action tracker

33 YEAR END FORECAST FINANCIAL REPORT

The Head of Corporate Services (HoCS) presented a forecast of the year-end financial performance of the council for the financial year 2022/23. She informed the committee that there is a potential over spend of £101,000 due to the annual pay rise being agreed at 4.7% rather than 1.5% and projects being funded by reserves. In addition, the reserve agreed at budget setting of £125,000 to balance the budget for 2022/23 shall be needed. This forecast is based on information to period 5 (August 2022) and will be updated each month. The CEO informed the Committee that monthly meetings are being held with service managers to ensure an effective budget and financial management process is in place. This process will be used to drive down spending until the end of the financial year and reduce the overspend position.

Councillor Wilson commented on the reserves and pointed out that this should not fall below three months of operational expenditure, and that currently the Council is able to meet this requirement

comfortably. Councillor Wilson also raised the issue of the level of subsidy to Elgiva and the Gym and Swim and confirmed the Council had wanted to see reductions in the subsidy level year on year. He requested a plan is produced as part of the budget setting process for 2023/24 to ensure a reduction in subsidy is agreed next year. The CEO responded that usually most leisure centres are seen as profitable, but we need to increase the standard of the facilities at Gym and Swim for this to be achieved. He also confirmed that most theatres are struggling to break-even, and Councils often subsidise this offer. Councillor Macbean pointed out that Elgiva extension project has stalled. She pointed out that the Elgiva is a key community asset and that with other revenue streams it can achieve the financial position the Council aspires.

Councillor Macbean also expressed concern about how the CARE Committee is being presented, and that when requests were brought by officers to the committee it was not made clear this was to be funded from reserves. In response, the CEO said that the forecast presented at this meeting is not intended to paint a negative picture of the Council or any Committee, but to ensure that information is provided to help the committees reach informed decisions. He went on to confirm the Council has the required operational reserve and that the CARE Committee was following the request of Council in January 2022, to agree how the additional reserves might be spent.

Councillor Wilson thanked the officers on the quality of the forecast financial report presented to the committee. He suggested that footnotes should be included on variances. The CEO agreed this would be a helpful addition to the report and shall be included in the next report to this committee. The Committee asked to place on record its recognition of the new working practices across the council currently in place and expressed their gratitude to the CEO and staff for this.

RESOLVED:

- i) **The Financial forecast report is noted by the Committee**

34. ELGIVA STAGE FLYING SYSTEM REPAIRS

The Chair confirmed that he has approved £10,000 to fund the repairs of the lighting bar winches and hemp set using emergency powers because the last meeting had to be cancelled at short notice and this was a health and safety item which needed to be completed to keep the Elgiva Theatre open. The CEO confirmed this would be funded from reserves but that a further grant had been received for the Meades Water Garden Boardwalk, of an equivalent amount to the winches cost, which would mean no increase in the bottom line over spend will occur.

RESOLVED:

- i) **Members note the decision made by the Chair of the Finance Committee to fund the repairs to the winches from reserves.**

35. FORWARD PLAN

The committee noted that all items on the Forward Plan. Councillor Augustus and Baum proposed the idea of councillors meeting with managers in order to get to know them and better understand the nature of their work. They felt that regular interactions with key staff will help strengthen relations. The CEO responded that a 'meet the managers' informal event can be arranged. An updated organogram will also be published on the website.

The meeting closed at 8.48pm