



Midsomer Norton Town Council

Council Offices, The Town Hall, The Island, Midsomer Norton, BA3 2HQ
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Mayor: Councillor Martyn Plant Locum Town Clerk: Lee Jakeman

Date Monday 21st October 2024
Time 7pm
Location Council Chambers, The Hollies, High Street, Midsomer Norton
Present Cllrs Shaun Hughes, Martyn Plant (Chair) and Cheryl Scott
Absent
Also, in Lee Jakeman (Locum Town Clerk) and Kate Egan (RFO)
Attendance

1 - Public Session

The period of time designated for public participation at a meeting in accordance with standing orders shall not exceed 20 minutes unless directed by the Chair of the meeting. A member of the public shall not speak for more than 3 minutes.

There were two members of the public in attendance.

2 - Apologies for Absence

Cllr Charlotte Lucas

3 - Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

1. Members to declare any interests which are not currently entered in the member's register of interests, or he/she has not notified the Monitoring Officer of it.
2. To receive written requests for dispensation for disclosable pecuniary interests.
3. To grant any request for dispensation as appropriate.

Decision: There were not declarations of interest or request for dispensations.

4 - Confirmation of Previous Minutes

Proposal to approve the previous minutes from the meeting held on 16th September 2024.

Decision: The Committee RESOLVED to accept the minutes of the Finance and Operations Committee meeting held on 16th September 2024 as a true record, these were signed and dated by the Chair of the Committee.

5 - Approval of payments and signature of the monthly bank reconciliation.

1. Proposal to approve and sign the monthly Bank Reconciliation for September.
2. Proposal to approve the payments for September 2024

Decision: The Committee RESOLVED to approve and sign the Monthly Bank Reconciliations; they were signed by Cllr Cheryl Scott. The Committee also RESOLVED to approve the payments for September 2024. The Income and Expenditure Report and monthly Budget Review were noted by the Committee.

6 - Risk Assessments

To receive and consider approving a further set of revised risk assessments in relation to grounds maintenance and office activities.

Decision: The Committee RESOLVED to approve the further set of revised risk assessments in relation to grounds maintenance and office activities.

7 - Budget

To receive and review a report and draft budget proposals for 2025-2026 from the RFO.

Members considered a report from the RFO which highlighted potential scenarios for the budget for FY 2025/26.

Members discussed in depth a range of issues. They noted the aspirations provided by individual members that had been requested for consideration. Much discussion occurred regarding the cost of the Town Hall project and uncertainty regarding the final costs, which were complicating the budget preparation thought processes.

Members further noted that several regular recipients of grant funding had been written to, requesting that more detailed financial information be provided in order that a more accurate assessment could be made of their financial needs before settling on an appropriate figure for grant funding (beneficiaries had been asked to respond by 18th November 2024).

Members also noted that there was likely to be an additional pressure to increase spending on green and open spaces – but as yet not precisely defined.

Members discussed the appropriate level of general reserve to be maintained. Whilst the aspiration was to increase the level of the general reserve and were generally of the view that any increase in the general reserve should not increase the level of general taxation on residents above current levels of inflation. The general view as that the general reserve should be approximately 6-months' worth of the budget/precept.

Members felt that whilst many of the aspirations of individual councillors to increase spend and service had merit, they felt that these should not be included within the budget if it were to put upward pressure on the precept above current levels of inflation.

Members were keen to understand the final costs of the Town Hall before committing to new or novel aspirations. It was hoped that during the budget setting process, leading up to Christmas that these might be more accurately defined.

There was a general view that, at this time, the budget should be considering doing that which the Council currently undertakes, and that many of the costs were largely of an un discretionary nature, but with an acceptance that for many items an increase in line with current levels of inflation was unavoidable.

Members discussed the level of ad-hoc/ general grant funding currently budgeted for and whether it was appropriate to tax the residents directly.

Members noted that the annual pay award for the current year had not been finalised and that there remained some unhelpful uncertainty around what a large part of the council budget is.

Members generally considered that some budget provision should be made for some new or additions to services, but it was not appropriate to define which of these might have priority at this time (noting that the Council is about to embark on a visioning process). It might be prudent to create a budget line for 'contingency projects' to allow some funding to be available for some projects and for that spend to be identified once the Council is more certain of its level of general reserve towards the end of or at the beginning of the next financial year and once the Council had undertaken its visioning event.

Members acknowledged that they had not confirmed specific levels of budget expenditure but had laid down a general framework in which officers might look to satisfy what might be considered competing demands.

Members asked that officers review the predicted outturns of current budgets, to identify any realistic cost savings that might be achieved and refine any (largely) non-discretionary items for next year.

8 - Date of Next Meeting

Next Finance and Operations Committee Meeting to be held on Monday 18th November 2024

9 - Exclusion of the Press and Public

Proposal under Section 1, Paragraph 2 of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business because publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

Decision: The Committee RESOLVED under Section 1, Paragraph 2 of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business because publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

10 - Office Accommodation

To consider a request from the Town Clerk that they be granted delegated authority to arrange and negotiate temporary office accommodation for use by the administrative staff from December 2024 while a permanent solution can be identified.

Meeting closed 8.38pm

Decision: The Committee RESOLVED to grant delegated authority to the Locum Town Clerk to arrange and negotiate temporary office accommodation for use by the administrative staff from December 2024 while a permanent solution can be identified.

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