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**STANSTED MOUNTFITCHET PARISH COUNCIL FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE**

MINUTES of a meeting of the **FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE** held at 7.30pm on Wednesday 12th January 2022 at The Mountfitchet Exchange, Crafton Green, 72 Chapel Hill, Stansted Mountfitchet, Essex

**PRESENT** Cllr J O’Brien (Chair), Cllrs M Caton and M Jessup

**ATTENDING** Mrs Ruth Clifford – Parish Clerk

 Mrs Emma Philbrick – Trainee Deputy Clerk

 Cllrs A Barnes, A Guney, J Hogg, L Prior, F Richards and G Sell – Via Zoom

 1 member of the press – Via Zoom

 1 member of the public – Via Zoom

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**287 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Smith as his new baby is still in intensive care. Having been proposed by Cllr Jessup and seconded by Cllr Caton it was unanimously

 **RESOLVED** to accept the apologies from Cllr Smith

 Cllr Sell asked if the Council’s best wishes could be sent to Cllr Smith and his family. The Clerk confirmed that this had been done last week.

**288 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST -** None

**289 TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 1ST DECEMBER 2021**

 **RESOLVED** To accept the minutes of the meeting held on 1st December 2021 as a true and accurate account.

**290 TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE ON PROGRESS SINCE THE LAST MEETING**

The lights reported had been repaired.

**291 TO RECEIVE THE CHAIRMAN’S REPORT -** Attached

 Cllr Sell noted the reference to the rate of inflation perhaps dropping by October but urged members to be cautious as he had heard that this was not the case, and it would still remain high. Cllr Hogg supported this statement. The Chair highlighted the imminent increase in energy bills and the impact this would have on members of the community. The services delivered by Touchpoint would be more in demand that previously. Cllr Sell stated that the CAB also delivers debt management advice and Cllr Richards believed that it did not matter which organisation was giving the advice as long as it was available in the community.

**292 LIGHTING**

**a) TO RECEIVE AN OUTAGE REPORT -** Circulated to members ahead of the meeting

**b) TO RECEIVE A GENERAL REPORT -** Circulated to members ahead of the meeting

**293 FINANCE**

**a) TO APPROVE THE LIST OF PAYMENTS FOR AUTHORISATION**

This was circulated to all members ahead of the meeting and a couple of queries answered. The list of payments was approved by the quorum attending the meeting.

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**b) TO RECEIVE THE SUMMARY INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT TO 31/12/21**

This was circulated to all members ahead of the meeting and no queries raised

**c) TO RECEIVE THE VAT RETURN TO 31/12/21**

This was circulated to all members ahead of the meeting and no queries raised

**294 TO CONSIDER THE DRAFT BUDGET FOR 2022/23 AND MAKE A RECOMMENDATION TO FULL COUNCIL**

The Clerk stated that the draft 5-year budget had been circulated previously and had been considered in detail at the previous Committee meeting. No changes had been made to the document since that time. She reminded members that two major contracts, grass cutting, and gardening had been out to tender and whilst the final selection of contractor was yet to be agreed, the figures included in the draft budget would not need to be amended.

 The Chair then referred to the precept options document which had also been previously circulated. This document asked members to consider two additional items for inclusion in the budget. The first was £10,000 to build up a fund, over a four-year period, for the surveying and approval of extra land acquired for burials. As members are aware, the current parish cemetery is almost at full capacity. The costs of surveying any land and securing the necessary permissions are high, anything between £30,000 and £40,000. With the Chair’s consent, Cllr Alan Barnes (Chair of Open Spaces Committee), confirmed this to be the case and stated there would also be other costs such as fencing and parking to be considered. Cllr Sell considered that this was in important issue for the community and the Council had no choice but to raise the funds for this provision.

Secondly, Election costs, the Chair reminded members that we had raised £2,500 in the current year and had agreed to raise the same amount in 2022/23. However, unforeseen elections in the current year have cost the Council £8,586 so even with £5,000 raised through the precept, there is still a shortfall. The Council currently has another vacancy, and it is unknown at the present time whether a further Election will be called. If so, this could add another £5,000 to the bill. The Clerk reminded members that there is an earmarked reserve of just under £9,800 but this would be wiped out if all the costs were taken from there. Cllr Sell pointed out that the democratic process can be expensive, and he hoped that we would enter a period of stability until the next scheduled Elections in 2023.

 Cllr O’Brien acknowledged the Council’s current policy of trying to maintain a 2% maximum increase in the precept. However, if 2% was added to the current year’s figure this would generate a precept of £423,231, and if you added on £10,000 for the Cemetery and £3,500 for Elections this would result in a precept of £436,731, a real increase of 13p per week per Band D household or 5.32%. Both Cllrs O’Brien and Sell stated their belief that the precept should not exceed 5%.

 The Clerk drew attention to the Council’s general reserve which at 31st March 2021 stood at £125,000. This represents approx. 30% of the current years’ precept and is at a level acceptable to the auditor. Cllr Jessup noted that if Touchpoint sign a lease on Crafton Green House, this would remove liability for the Business Rates for the Council, thereby freeing up approx. £9,000. The Clerk confirmed this to be the case and at that point should the Council agree that money could be vired towards refurbishment costs for the building. As the grant applications for improvement works at the Day Centre and Crafton Green House have not yet been decided, this is a matter which will have to be revisited in due course.

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 Cllr Sell considered it was important to remind members that the coming year would see progress on the Uttlesford Local Plan and depending on the development sites included for Stansted, this Council may need to seek professional planning advice which could result in significant cost. Cllr O’Brien asked if he was proposing to add a figure into the budget to cover such an eventuality, but Cllr Sell said no, he just wanted to flag this. The Chair agreed that this would be borne in mind as the year progresses and should additional funds be required, members may have to consider taking this from the Council’s free reserve or from another ear marked reserve.

 Cllr Jessup, the Committee Vice-Chair, stated that he was keen to keep the increase as low as possible and would favour including an allocation for the Cemetery but not for Election costs. If this route was followed, the total increase would be 4.48% or 11p per week per Band D household. Cllrs Caton, Richards and Sell all supported this position.

 Cllr Jessup then proposed the following

 **RECOMMENDATION** that the Parish Council set a precept for the financial year 2022/23 of £433,231 equating to 4.48% or 11p per week for a Band D household.

 This was seconded by Cllr Caton and unanimously agreed.

 Members also hoped that the Full Council would adopt the draft 5-year budget as circulated with the addition of £10,000 for future Cemetery needs.

Meeting closed 8.17pm

**NO ACTION POINTS**