



**MINUTES OF THE FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE MEETING ON  
TUESDAY 3<sup>RD</sup> DECEMBER 2024 AT THE OFFICES OF BIGGLESWADE TOWN  
COUNCIL, THE OLD COURT HOUSE, 4 SAFFRON ROAD, BIGGLESWADE  
COMMENCING AT 7.00PM**

**PRESENT:**

Cllr D Strachan (Chairman)  
Cllr I Agnew (Deputy Chairman)  
Cllr D Albone  
Cllr G Barrett (Ex-officio member)  
Cllr M Foster (Ex-officio member)  
Cllr M Knight  
Cllr M North  
Cllr M Russell  
Cllr C Thomas

Mr P Tarrant – Town Clerk & Chief Executive  
Mr K Hosseini – Head of Governance & Strategic Partnerships  
Mr E Bower – Head of Finance & Deputy RFO  
Mr H Henderson – Public Realm Manager  
Mx K Chambers – Committee Clerk

Members of the Public – 1.

**Meeting Formalities:**

Following a reminder to meeting attendees, both panel and public, that this is a formal meeting, the Chairman advised that members of the public will be given an opportunity to speak during public open session but not at other times. The meeting is being filmed and by being present attendees are deemed to have agreed be filmed and to the use of those images and sound recordings. The Chairman advised that attendees should not disclose any personal information of individuals as this would infringe the Data Protection Rights of the individual. The Chairman asked everyone to mute their microphones when not speaking.

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

a. Cllr S Sajid.

**b. Remote Attendance**

Cllr S Sajid.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

**a. Disclosable Pecuniary interests in any agenda item:**

None.

**b. Non-Pecuniary interests in any agenda item:**

None.

**3. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman noted the recent Christmas Lights Switch On went well and thanked Town Council and Public Realm staff for their efforts.

**4. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION**

**a. Cllr G Fage, Ward Councillor for Biggleswade East**

Cllr Fage noted that Central Bedfordshire Council has a £32 million shortfall this year. The plan was to reduce costs by reshaping the organisation and this would inevitably be a cause for concern amongst staff over the Christmas period.

Cllr Fage also noted that Item 9a (2025/26 Budget & Precept) appeared to be the first time that the Town Council's budget is being discussed with in a public setting. He recognised the call for additional Public Realm staff and hoped that this would provide visible benefit for residents.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Fage for his observations and noted that these would be addressed within the upcoming discussion.

**5. INVITED SPEAKER**

**6. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS**

There were no Members' questions.

**7. MINUTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF MEETINGS**

The Minutes were **APPROVED** as an accurate record of the Finance & General Purposes Committee held on **Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2024** and the Chairman authorised to sign the document.

**8. MATTERS ARISING**

- a. Cllr Russell asked whether she had sent apologies for the last meeting or attended. The Chairman responded that Cllr Russell's comments would be noted.

**9. ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION**

**a. 2025/2026 Budget and Precept**

Members were advised that the meeting was not to set the precept for 2025/26 but to give Officers guidance to enable them to prepare their recommendations for the next Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting.

Members asked whether the priorities of Standing Committees (e.g. PLOS) were considered when developing the budget. The Town Clerk & Chief Executive responded that this was previously shared with Members within the detailed two Capital Programme Strategy reports and that all Members had been consulted during the process in accordance with the procedure agreed by Council.

Members noted the request for additional Public Realm staff and discussed the benefit that this may have on provision of services to residents.

Members also requested that summary of cost reductions amounting to £63,874 be shared with Members again. The Town Clerk & Chief Executive confirmed that this will be distributed accordingly. Members also asked that the budget setting meetings be incorporated into the standing committee meetings schedule to enable public scrutiny.

Members **RESOLVED** the following, subject to precept resolution of F & GP on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2025 and ratification and resolution of full Council on 21st January 2025:

- That their preferred level of budget for the year 2025/26 is total income £2,128,799.65 and total expenditure of £2,128,198 as presented Option 3 of the Officers' report.
- That their preferred level of precept for the 2025/26 year is Option 3, a £26.67 increase for the whole year or 13% increase for the whole year for a Band D property.
- To support the Officer recommendation around the minimum level of General Reserve for the 2025/26 financial year, notably a sum not lower than £526,119, consistent with good accounting practice and statute. The amount is equivalent to 3 months' gross expenditure.
- To support Officers making an application to the Public Works Loan Board for an amount up to £79,528. The loan is particular to essential upgrades to the remaining play areas for a term of 15 years. Prior to making such an application the Council will conduct a formal consultation exercise with the community and Bedfordshire Association of Town and Parish Councils (BATPC) will need to assess the submission.
- That the Town Council invest £25,000 in each of the next 4 years which will create a 'ringfenced capital fund' of £100,000. This will act to negate any future PWLB borrowing costs and/or impact upon a depleted Capital Reserve.

b. **Fees & Charges**

Members asked why some fees for non-residents have been reduced. The Head of Finance & Deputy RFO responded that non-resident fees are consistently four times that of fees for residents. Members commented that the definition of a resident may need to be reconsidered at a future PLOS Committee.

Members **RESOLVED** to recommend that Council adopt the new fees for 2025-26.

c. **S106**

Members **NOTED** the update from Officers.

10. **ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

a. **Interim Internal Audit Report**

Members **NOTED** the update from Officers.

b. **Bank Reconciliation**

Members **NOTED** the update from Officers.

11. **PUBLIC OPEN SESSION**

a. **Cllr G Fage, Ward Councillor for Biggleswade East**

Cllr Fage noted that he is willing to continue providing support for S106 and that the website should be live again soon.

Cllr Fage noted that residents may struggle with the £26 a year increase in council tax and that this should be considered by Members when making resolutions in January 2025.

**12. EXEMPT**

**a. Orchard Community Centre Update**

Members **RESOLVED** to accept the recommendations.

The Chairman closed the meeting at **8:05pm**.