



Ref: Agenda/F&GP– 18/03/2025

13th March 2025

Dear Sir/Madam

All Members of the Finance & General Purposes Committee are hereby summoned to the Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting of Biggleswade Town Council that will take place on **Tuesday 18th March 2025** at the **Offices of Biggleswade Town Council, The Old Court House, Saffron Road, Biggleswade** commencing at **7:00pm**, for the purpose of considering and recommending the business to be transacted as specified below.

Yours faithfully

Peter Tarrant
Town Clerk & Chief Executive

Distribution: All Town Councillors
 Notice Boards
 The Press

Committee Members:

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. S. Sajid
Cllr. C. Thomas

AGENDA

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Schedule 12 of the Local Government Act 1972 requires a record be kept of the Members present and that this record form part of the minutes of the meeting. Members who cannot attend a meeting should tender apologies to the Town Clerk and the Committee Clerk.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To receive Statutory Declarations of Interests from Members in relation to:

- a. Disclosable Pecuniary interests in any agenda item.
- b. Non-Pecuniary interests in any agenda item

3. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

4. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

To adjourn for a period of up to 15 minutes to allow members of the public to put questions or to address the Council, through the Chairman, pertaining to matters listed on the agenda.

Please register in advance for this webinar:

https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_BwvMw_5SRd-fib3MRIOyqQ

Each Speaker will give their name to the Chairman, prior to speaking, which will be recorded in the minutes, unless that person requests otherwise. Each Speaker will be allowed **one three-minute slot**.

5. INVITED SPEAKER

None.

6. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

7. MINUTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF MEETINGS

- a. The Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting held on **Tuesday 14th January 2025** at the Offices of Biggleswade Town Council, The Old Court House, Saffron Road, Biggleswade.

8. MATTERS ARISING

- a. The Minutes of Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting held on **Tuesday 14th January 2025**.

9. ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

- a. **Budget Planning Cycle 2026-27**

For Members to receive and consider a written report from the Head of Finance & Deputy RFO.

- b. **Grants Applications 2024/25 – Tranche Two**

For Members to receive and consider a written report from the Head of Finance & Deputy RFO.

10. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

- a. **Insurance Renewal**

The Town Council, from 31st March 2025, will be entering year three (2025/26) of the three-year agreement which the Town Council entered into in 2023. Officers reviewed the existing policy contents and cover in January 2025 with BHIB Insurance Brokers (now the Clear Group, accredited by SLCC and NALC) and the policy remains fit for purpose with a fidelity guarantee of £2m and public and product liability of £10m. Officers will meet the Clear Group again in November 2025 to review the policy and to procure best value cover from the insurance market with a view to sourcing a new insurance policy (general and vehicle) from 1st March 2026. The Council's Internal Auditor is content with the level of insurance for the Council.

b. **Orchard Centre Marketing Plan**

For Members to note a written report from the Deputy Administration & HR Manager.

11. **PUBLIC OPEN SESSION**

To adjourn for a period of up to 15 minutes to allow members of the public to put questions or to address the Council, through the Chairman, in respect of any other business of the Town Council.

Please register in advance for this webinar:

https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_BwvMw_5SRd-fib3MRIOyqQ

Each Speaker will give their name to the Chairman prior to speaking, which will be recorded in the minutes, unless that person requests otherwise. Each Speaker will be allowed **(one) three-minute slot**.

12. **EXEMPT ITEMS**

The following resolution will be **moved** that it is advisable in the public interest that the public and press are excluded whilst the following exempt items are discussed.

(Optimum Operating Model for Long-Term Letting).

Pursuant to section 1(2) of the public bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 Council **resolve** to exclude the public and press by reason of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted.



**MINUTES OF THE FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE MEETING ON
TUESDAY 14th JANUARY 2025 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 Russell

Mr P Tarrant – Town Clerk & Chief Executive
Mr K Hosseini – Head of Governance & Strategic Partnerships
Mr E Bour – Head of Finance & Deputy RFO
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 North, Cllr Sajid, Cllr Thomas

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman noted that all Committee Members have a dispensation to participate and vote in relation to the 2025/26 Budget & Precept.

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

None.

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

None.

3. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman had no announcements.

4. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

- a. **Cllr Grant Fage, Ward Councillor for Biggleswade East**

Cllr Fage raised concerns over increases to Council Tax and its impact on Biggleswade residents. He also noted that, in January 2022, the Town Council set a 7.5% increase but Members also resolved to ensure Officers find additional savings in the budget.

He noted that Officers had adhered to the budgeting process agreed at Council particular to the 25/26 financial year however, scrutiny by Standing Committees should ideally be held in public session. Cllr Fage asked Members to note his comments during the upcoming discussion.

5. INVITED SPEAKER

6. 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 3rd December 2024** and that the Chairman should sign the same.

8. MATTERS ARISING

a. Item 9a: 2025/2026 Budget and Precept

Cllr Knight noted that a summary of cost reductions had not been shared with Members. The Town Clerk & Chief Executive provided physical copies to all Members in the session and confirmed that he would share this electronically after the meeting.

9. ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

a. 2025/2026 Budget and Precept

Cllr Russell gave a detailed account around the justification for a 13% increase in precept, highlighting such issues as financial drivers outside of the Council's control, the thorough process that has been adhered to in its calculation, localised benchmarking, general reserve requirements, PWLB potential borrowing, and the need to invest in a capital reserve.

She further explained the reasoning behind the need to recruit two further Public Realm Operatives and presented the wider financial climate including the difficulties that Central Bedfordshire Council was experiencing.

The external drivers such as employer's national insurance combined with Members decision to invest in the Council's football pitches and defending a planning enquiry would require an increase of 8.5% without factoring in any further commitments.

Members went on to discuss the impact of Option 3 and what this would mean for the Council. Cllr Knight raised concerns about the impact the increase may have on Biggleswade residents and that the weekly figures provided were not representative of how Council Tax is paid by residents.

Cllr Knight requested that his opposition to the recommendations be noted.

Cllr Knight also requested that a full recorded vote be minuted.

Members **RESOLVED** to recommend to Council:

- That their preferred level of budget for the year 2025/26 is total income £2,129,818, and total expenditure of £2,129,818, as presented in Option 3 of the Officers' report.
- That their preferred level of precept for the 2025/26 year is Option 3 (£1,838,460.08), a £26.68 increase for the whole year, 51 pence per week, 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.

The recorded vote was as follows for the five part resolution:

- In favour: Cllr M. Russell, Cllr D. Albone, Cllr G. Barrett, Cllr M. Foster, Cllr I. Agnew, Cllr D. Strachan.
- Against: Cllr M. Knight.

Report to Council and Precept communication to CBC

The resolution of F & GP will be presented in a report to Council on 21st January 2025 for budget and precept final determination prior to officially sharing with Central Bedfordshire Councils Financial Planning Team on 22nd January 2025.

10. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

a. Quarterly Bank Reconciliation

Members **NOTED** the report.

11. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

a. Cllr Grant Fage, Ward Councillor for Biggleswade East

Cllr Fage reiterated that financial information should be shared freely with residents to scrutinise and that there should be more public meetings in the next financial year. He also echoed his concerns that this might have a negative impact on residents and that the Council needs to give "due regard for those who ... are unable to make ends meet".

The Chairman thanked Cllr Fage for his comments and noted that those who are disadvantaged may be entitled to Council Tax benefits and support.

12. **EXEMPT**

The Chairman closed the meeting at **7:46pm**.

DRAFT

BIGGLESWADE TOWN COUNCIL
Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting 18th March 2025
Item 9a: Budget Planning Cycle 2026-27

Implications of Recommendations

Corporate Strategy: FINANCIAL GOVERNANCE: Ensure that the Town Council continues to operate within legislation, regulation, ethical guidelines, and best practice.

Finance: Budget Planning Cycle 2026-27.

Equality: Not applicable.

Environment: Not applicable.

Community Safety: Not applicable.

Background

The new year draft budget cycle is attached as appendix A.

The draft has the support of the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Finance & General Purposes Committee.

Importantly the normal cycle has been adapted to incorporate detailed consultation with all Committees.

The progress of the budget planning cycle will be shared with Members during future Council and Committee meetings and the status column will be completed accordingly.

Recommendation:

Members to note the report and recommend to Council to adopt the Budget Planning Cycle for 2026-27.

Ernest Bour
Head of Finance & Deputy RFO

Appendix A: Budget Planning Cycle 2026-27.

2026 – 2027 ORIGINAL ESTIMATE PLANNING CYCLE

Ref	Date	Description	Attendees/Officer Lead	Output	Stages	Status
1.	3 rd September 2025	Communicate with Central Bedfordshire Council to acquire deadlines for submission of precept request.	Ernest Bour	Clean CBC timetable.	Determine budget timeline with CBC	
2.	5 th September 2025	Clean estimate of all payroll staffing costs, including projection of pay inflation.	Ernest Bour, Helen Calvert	Clean estimate of Staff costs for 26/27.	Produce draft budget	
3.	10 th September 2025	Review staff payroll costs.	Peter Tarrant, Ernest Bour and Helen Calvert	Staff costs reviewed in-depth.	Produce draft budget	
4.	12 th September 2025	Review latest projected outturn for 25/26 after half-year accounts finalised.	Peter Tarrant and Ernest Bour	Projected outturn 25/26.	Produce draft budget	
5.	17 th September 2025	Management Meetings to identify 26/27 growth requirements, revenue projections and price inflation.	Peter Tarrant, Ernest Bour, Karim Hosseini, Harry Henderson, Ian Campbell, Helen Calvert	Identification of 26/27 growth requirements, revenue projections and general reviews.	Produce draft budget	
6.	19 th September 2025	Management Meetings to identify 26/27 growth requirements, revenue projections and price inflation.	Peter Tarrant, Ernest Bour, Karim Hosseini, Harry Henderson, Ian Campbell, Helen Calvert	Identification of 26/27 growth requirements, revenue projections, identify cost reductions including efficiencies and general reviews.	Produce draft budget	
7.	30 th September 2025	Provide a thorough update to Mayor, Deputy Mayor F&GP Chair and Deputy Chair.	Peter Tarrant, Ernest Bour Mayor, Deputy Mayor F&GP Chair and Deputy Chair.	Internal progress update meeting	Incorporate Member commentary	
8.	14 th October 2025	Enter suggested new Original Estimate for 26/27, onto Rialtas.	Ernest Bour	26/27 original draft budget in Rialtas.	Produce draft budget	
9.	15 th October 2025	Thorough accuracy and sense-check review of suggested new Original Estimate for 26/27, on Rialtas.	Peter Tarrant and Ernest Bour	26/27 original draft budget in Rialtas fully reviewed for accuracy.	Produce draft budget	

10.	21 st October 2025	Formal evening meeting with Public Lands & Open Spaces Committee members	All PLOS Committee Members, Peter Tarrant, Karim Hosseini, and Ernest Bour	To discuss and review PLOS Budget for 26/27.	Incorporate Member commentary	
11.	28 th October 2025	Formal evening meeting with Town Centre Committee members.	All TCM Members, Peter Tarrant, Karim Hosseini, and Ernest Bour	To discuss and review TCM Budget for 26/27.	Incorporate Member commentary	
12.	4 th November 2025	Formal evening meeting with Personnel Committee members.	All Personnel Committee Members, Peter Tarrant, Karim Hosseini, and Ernest Bour	To discuss and review Personnel Budget for 26/27.	Incorporate Member commentary	
13.	10 th November 2025	Provide a thorough update to F&GP Chair and Deputy Chair.	Peter Tarrant, Ernest Bour, & Membres	Fully informed Chair and Deputy Chair of F&GP.	F & GP Chair & Deputy Chair Overview	
14.	25 th November 2025	Formal consultation with broader Members at Council.	All Members	Broad Member sign off.	Broad Member consultation	
15.	2 nd December 2025	Formal evening meeting with Finance & General Purposes Committee members.	All F&GP Members, Peter Tarrant, Karim Hosseini and Ernest Bour	To discuss and review F&GP Budget for 26/27	F & GP resolution	
16.	6 th January 2025	Sign off at F&GP Committee.	All F&GP Members, Peter Tarrant, Karim Hosseini and Ernest Bour	Agree on a formal resolution ready to be presented to Town Council on 20 st January.	Incorporate Member commentary	
17.	20 st January 2026	Sign off at Town Council.	Town Council	Final precept agreed by Members.	Council consideration & resolution	
18.	23 rd January 2026	Complete CBC forms with precept request.	Ernest Bour	To be signed by Peter Tarrant as RFO.	Communicate precept to CBC	

BIGGLESWADE TOWN COUNCIL
Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting 18th March 2025
Grant Applications 24/25 Tranche Two

Implications of Recommendations

Corporate Strategy: Ensure that the Town Council continues to operate within legislation, regulation, ethical guidelines and best practice.

Finance: Award available budget to support operation and development of Community Clubs, Charities and other organisations in Biggleswade.

Equality: Not applicable.

Environment: Not applicable.

Community Safety: Not applicable.

Purpose of the Report

To Present to Members the applications received for funding from the Community Grant Fund.

Background:

Biggleswade Town Council acknowledges the significant contribution that Community Clubs, Charities and other organisations make to enrich and improve the quality of life for so many residents in the town. Officers emailed organisations to apply for the Community grant and highlighted the deadline of the application window. The BTC Community grant has been advertised in local newspapers, bulletins, social media platforms including websites and the Councils website.

The Town Council has a budget of £28,000 to cover the two tranches of grant applications for the 2024/25 financial year of which £17,063 remains unspent. The applications are considered without prejudice.

Process for awarding grant requests

The Town Council's Grant Policy states that "Finance and General Purposes Committee can approve grants to a maximum of £2,000 and recommend to Council for grants above £2,000". The guidelines and criteria for grants are detailed on the Councils website ([Grants-Policy-as-amended-By-Council-Feb-2024.pdf \(biggleswadetowncouncil.gov.uk\)](#)). None of the 11 grant applications is above £2,000.

Summary:

The grant applications are summarised in tabular form in the attached Appendix A. Each individual application is available in full on SharePoint([Grants February 2025](#)) and hard copies will be made available for those Members who express a preference.

Recommendation:

Officers recommend that Members consider each individual grant application without prejudice. The value of the combined requested applications is £12,870 which is within the available budget of £17,063 which remains unspent for the financial year 2024/25.

Ernest Bour
Head of Finance and Deputy RFO

Appendix A: BTC grant applications 2024-25 Tranche 2.

Biggleswade Town Council - Grants Applications 2024-2025

		2022/23 (1)		2022/23 (2)		2023/24 (1)		2023/24 (2)		2024/25 (1)		Grants Requested 2024/25 Tranche 2, to be paid by BACS 25.03.25	Tranche 2 2024/25 Awarded
	Organisation	Requested (£)	Awarded (£)	Requested (£)	Awarded (£)	Requested (£)	Awarded (£)	Requested (£)	Awarded (£)	Requested (£)	Awarded (£)		
1	Above and beyond Cancer											£500.00	
2	Biggleswade History Society			900	900			900	900			£900.00	
3	Biggleswade Arts Collective CIC (BIGG Theatre)	2000	2000			2000	1500			2000		£2,000.00	
4	Biggles FM			1850	1850			1850	1850			£1,850.00	
5	Biggleswade Community Gardens	2000	0	1500	500	1500	1000					£470.00	
6	Biggleswade Community Group			2000	1500	2000	1000	1200	400	1500	1500	£1,000.00	
7	CHUMS Charity											£2,000.00	
8	Future Action Biggleswade											£150.00	
9	Hear2Listen CIC			1000	1000			1000	800			£2,000.00	
10	Keech Hospice Care			1000	1000			1000	1000			£1,000.00	
11	Biggleswade Community Carnival			1189	500	1500	1000					£1,000.00	
	Total (£)	18476	9526	17439	12100	36661	11411	18250	11000	15538	10937	£12,870.00	£ -
	% awarded from requested (£)		52%		69%		31%		60%		70%		
	Number of applications		18		14		14		14		13	0	
	Number of applications over £2,000		1		0		0		0		0	0	

BIGGLESWADE TOWN COUNCIL
F&GP Committee Meeting 18th March 2025
Item 10b: Promotional & Marketing Plan for The Orchard Community Centre

Implications of Recommendations

Corporate Strategy: ENGAGEMENT: Ensure that content on the website is open, transparent, up to date and clearly identifies the Town Council's intention and purpose in everything it does.

Finance: To increase operational revenue from The Orchard Centre.

Equality: Not applicable.

Environment: Not applicable.

Community Safety: Not applicable.

Background

The Orchard Community Centre aims to enhance its visibility, attract more bookings and foster greater community engagement. To achieve these goals, a structured social media campaign has been developed, leveraging Facebook and Instagram as primary promotional platforms. The campaign is designed to highlight the centre's facilities, showcase past and current events, engage potential customers, and offer limited time incentives to encourage early bookings.

Summary

The promotional strategy below are examples which focus on different aspects of audience engagement.

- **Example 1: Awareness & Introduction**
 - Posts introduce the centre's key features, versatile event spaces, and testimonials from past users.
 - A "Did You Know?" series shares interesting facts about the venue.
- **Example 2: Engagement & Booking Promotions**
 - Offers limited-time discounts for early bookings.
 - Showcases past events to inspire potential renters.
 - Includes a behind-the-scenes look at event setups.
- **Example 3: Customer Testimonials & Community Connection**
 - Features customer reviews to build credibility.
 - Engages the audience with Q&A sessions and polls.
- **Example 4: Final Push & Special Offers**
 - Reinforces promotional discounts and booking deadlines.
 - Highlights creative event ideas and past customer testimonials.
 - Encourages immediate action for securing reservations.

Additional marketing efforts include partnerships with local businesses, optimising Google My Business listings, running targeted ads, and hosting an open-day event to showcase the venue.

Recommendation:

For Members to note the report.

Funda Gumush
Deputy Administration & HR Manager

