

Annual Town Council Meeting 30 April 2015

Finance and General Purpose Committee – Chairman’s Report – Cllr P Winter

Firstly, I’d like to offer my apologies for not being here tonight due to a family funeral, and would like to show my appreciation to my Deputy Terry Widdows for presenting my report.

This Committee oversees the Budget for the Town Council, monitoring the income and expenditure against various budget lines. This includes the setting of the Precept for the forthcoming year to ensure that sufficient funds are available to meet the costs of the Council’s day-to day activities as well as maintaining provisions to meet its statutory obligations in respect of the historic buildings; Market House and Town Council Offices and lands we are responsible for; Recreation Ground, Cemetery and Dog Hill Wood.

The Precept requested for 2014/2015 was £272k and represented a modest increase of 1.99% or £5k. Over the past 5 years this Council recognised the financial hardship and tough economic conditions and in doing so looked to minimise the impact from increasing costs, by limiting the Precept to only a moderate increase year on year. This meant however that we relied upon meeting any unplanned costs from our working balance or directly from Reserves.

The Council managed to reduce the planned expenditure across all 3 committees for the coming year (down from £335k to £321K) however this was simply not sufficient to redress the reduction in working balance and need to steadily build Reserves. This meant that the Council agreed to a Precept for 2015/2016 of £297k representing an increase of 9.23% or £25k.

I understand a completed expenditure and income for the year 2014/2015 has been made available in a circulated summary, together with the Budget details for 2015/2016.

Some of you will be aware of statements from a number of different sources that have attacked the integrity of our Clerk and this Council. I and a number of fellow councillors reviewed the evidence and found no merit in these allegations. It is clear the Clerk under delegated powers acted in good faith in implementing the decisions of this Council, actions corroborated by the Independent Auditor. It is my belief that those members of the Neighbourhood Plan working group should take collective responsibility for some of the failings.

The particular transaction in question tested the Council’s Financial Regulations that were amended only last summer and there was some ambiguity that quite rightly raised some concerns around our procedures. There has though been no wrong doing. There are learning’s, the rectification to address this is clear, the regulations will need to be reviewed by the new council and I welcome this approach.

On a more positive note, the Council renewed its Civil Marriage and Civil Partnerships licence and in doing so agreed to redecorate and upgrade the Jacobean Ceremony Room. The results are fantastic - you may have seen the photos on the Council web site or in the Ledbury Focus.

Finally I’d like to personally acknowledge the support received from the Clerk and office staff whose dedication and commitment makes my role of Chair so much easier. And finally to my fellow Councillors for their work and support throughout the year.