

STRATFORD-UPON-AVON TOWN COUNCIL

FINANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

19 November 2024

6:30pm to 9:15pm

Minutes

Present Councillors:

Alcock (Deputy Chair)	Albon
Fojtik	J. Fradgley
Lee	Vos

Clerk:	Responsible Financial Officer
Press:	None
Public:	None

27. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Smith and accepted for the reasons given.

28. Declarations of Interest

Declarations were made by Councillor Fojtik who sits on the Stratford-upon-Avon Christmas Lights Committee, and Councillor J. Fradgley who sits on the Stratford in Bloom Committee. This is pertinent to budget discussions.

29. To receive written requests for dispensation for disclosable pecuniary interests

There were no written or verbal requests for dispensations.

30. Public Participation

There were no members of the public present.

31. To approve the draft open Minutes of the Finance & Audit Committee held on 3 September 2024

It was Proposed, Seconded and unanimously

RESOLVED:

That the draft Open Minutes of the Finance & Audit Committee Meeting held on 3 September 2024 be approved as a correct record.

32. To approve the draft open Minutes of the Asset Register Review Group held on 24 September 2024

It was Proposed, Seconded and unanimously

RESOLVED:

That the draft Open Minutes of the Asset Register Review Group Meeting held on 24 September 2024 be approved as a correct record, subject to the amendment of the date of the next meeting.

33. Town Clerk's Open Report
Open Report Pages 1-4 Appendices 'A-I'

33.1. Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) update for the year 2023/24

The RFO updated members on the progress of the revised AGAR submission and was pleased to confirm that the Town Council has successfully passed the AGAR for 2023/24. There were comments back from the auditor regarding the amended submission however no guidance had been provided at that time, though this had no bearing on the outcome of the audit. The RFO has followed the new guidance as required.

The final comment from the auditor was in relation to the level of the general reserve, and their observation is that it is too low and should be a minimum of 3 month's expenditure. This aligns with advice recently received from WALC, and members should take this into consideration during the budget and precept setting process.

Members noted the report.

33.2. To receive the Management Accounts for the period 1 April 2023 – 30 September 2024 (to 31 October 2024 if available)

The RFO flagged areas of concern as outlined in the report, such as Market and Open Spaces Income, Civic Travel, and the ongoing topic of the general reserve on which there was discussion amongst the Councillors on working towards a resolution in subsequent budgets.

Members noted the report.

33.3. To review the draft budget for the year 2025/26

Councillors and the RFO reviewed the 2025/26 budget line-by-line to see where savings and efficiencies could be made before considering any increase to the rate charge. This version of the budget had a £92,000 deficit.

It was again highlighted that historic below inflation increases have led to the current position with regards to budget deficits and reserve levels, however the Precept request was not on the agenda for discussion until the December meeting.

33.3.1. The question of CPI vs CPIH was raised as it makes a significant difference to the budget.

It was Proposed, Seconded and

RESOLVED: to add this to December's agenda for discussion to allow Councillors to make their own considerations.

33.3.2. The Christmas Festival expenditure was discussed at length. The Town Clerk is already in discussion with the District Council on this.

It was Proposed, Seconded and

RESOLVED: that that a cap be put on the Town Council's share following 2 years of large, unexpected increases beyond the budgeted amount. The Town Clerk will take this forward.

- 33.3.3. An item that has a large impact on the 2025/26 budget is the planned change to Employer's NI contributions – increasing the rate to 15% and lowering the threshold from £9,100 to £5,000 per annum. In addition, there was discussion around the usual consideration of whether any NJC pay award would be given for 2025/26 and what it may be, as this is set long after the budget has been agreed.

Some potential CAPEX projects were put into this draft of the budget such as website and IT systems, with figures to be firmed up at a subsequent meeting following the receipt of quotes. A decision will then be made on whether or not to take them forward. There was also discussion around building up reserves for future large works, however it was decided that may need to be deferred to future budgets if the deficit cannot be adequately reduced. Further scrutiny would be given at the December meeting for the replacement of some of the Ballroom seating which is reaching end of life.

Civic Events were also brought under scrutiny, to see where savings could be made. One of the largest Civic expenditures is event security, and it was discussed that there should be no compromise on the level of security provided and instead to focus on procurement efficiencies and reducing the requirement for security by reviewing the number / type of events with this necessity.

It was Proposed, Seconded and

RESOLVED: that a further draft of the budget would be reviewed in December once more management accounts were available and firmer costings available for items such as Event Security, CAPEX projects and staff costs following the

2024/25 pay award this month and cross departmental recharges carried out.

- 33.3.4. There was much discussion on ensuring support was continued to be given to local initiatives, however this needed to be balanced with the operational needs of the Town Council and any proposed increase in the rate charge. It was proposed

It was Proposed, Seconded and

RESOLVED: to cap contributions for initiatives over £20,000 at £27,500 with a view to reviewing again in December and possibly reducing as necessary, and any contingency removed. Initiatives under £20,000 was reduced to £12,500 as further information is required.

- 33.3.5. The RFO suggested to Councillors that a reserve be made for Town Hall Commercial Management that can be used for improvements relating to Town Hall Hire. This would be funded by any year end surplus for Town Hall Commercial Management, with a percentage of this used for local initiatives or similar.

It was Proposed, Seconded and

RESOLVED: to put the proposal to the Civic, Heritage and Events Committee for consideration.

- 33.4. To review the Town Council's investment strategy

Each year the Finance Committee are required to review the Town Council's investment strategy.

It was Proposed, Seconded and

RESOLVED: To defer this agenda item to December's meeting due to time constraints.

33.5. To review and approve Financial Policies and Procedures

Members were presented with the three policy and procedure documents that require annual review.

- Terms of Reference
- Financial Regulations
- Reserves Policy

It was Proposed, Seconded and

RESOLVED: To defer this agenda item to December's meeting due to time constraints.

34. Responsible Financial Officer's Verbal Report

For information only

There were no verbal updates from the RFO.

35. Town Clerk's Verbal Report

For information only

There were no verbal updates from the Town Clerk.

36. Items Carried Forward from previous meetings for update

36.1. Accounting Contract Review

This is ongoing with the RFO and Chair of Finance, in tandem with the approved supplier review. Updates will be provided when available.

36.2. Approved Suppliers – Task & Finish Group

An invitation was sent to members to join the task & finish group. At the time of the meeting, there was an insufficient

number of Councillors in the group to be quorate. A reminder will be sent out and if necessary, taken to Town Council by the Town Clerk to gain membership.

36.3. Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Policy – Task & Finish Group

An invitation was sent to members to join the task & finish group. At the time of the meeting, there was an insufficient number of Councillors in the group to be quorate. A reminder will be sent out and if necessary, taken to Town Council by the Town Clerk to gain membership.

36.4. Changes to budget and management accounts documents

The RFO, in conjunction with the Chair of Finance, has implemented some changes to the management accounts and budget layout to make costings and reporting more accurate. Changes would like to be made to the current reporting structure and requires Councillor input to ensure the needs of the Council are still met.

It was Proposed, Seconded and

RESOLVED: To defer this agenda item to December's meeting due to time constraints.

36.5. Card Payment Machine

Following the various options researched by the RFO, it was

It was Proposed, Seconded and

RESOLVED: To arrange a SumUp account and machine for use by the Town Council.

37. Items For Information Only / Future Agendas

There were no items to add to this section.

38. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting is on Tuesday 3 December 2024 at 5:30pm at the Town Hall.

39. Confidential Items

Committee went to confidential session to discuss any confidential items for the meeting.

Chair: