



**FLITWICK TOWN COUNCIL**  
**Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes meeting held on**  
**Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2025 at the Rufus Centre at 7:45pm**

Present:

Cllr T Parsons (Chairman)  
Cllr A Snape  
Cllr I Blazeby  
Cllr T Harald  
Cllr J Roberts

Also present:

Stacie Lockey – Town Clerk & Chief Executive (TC)  
Stephanie Stanley – Deputy Town Clerk & RFO (DTC)  
Helen Glover – Senior Finance Officer (SFO)  
0 Members of the public

**19. Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

**20. Declarations of Interest**

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

- (a)** Disclosable Pecuniary interests in any agenda item – no items.
- (b)** Non-Pecuniary interests in any agenda item – no items.

**21. Public Open Session**

No items.

**22. Members Questions**

No items.

**23. Minutes**

- a.** For Members to approve the minutes of the Finance & GP Meeting held on **Monday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2024**, this meeting was held at the Rufus Centre.

It was **resolved** to approve the minutes of the Finance & GP Meeting held on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2024 at the Rufus Centre as a true record.

**24. Matters Arising**

- a.** Minutes of the Finance & GP Meeting held on **Monday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2024**.

Cllr Snape asked for an update on the business rates discussions. The DTC explained that the advisor had visited the Rufus Centre and 3 Station Road. A report was being prepared regarding the Rufus Centre rates and whether or not to apply to the Valuation Office about a revaluation considering potential hospitality relief.

The process had begun to seek exemption from paying rates for 3 Station Road due to the building refurbishment works. It was hoped that this could be dated from 23<sup>rd</sup> September, when the roof works began, but it might be that the exemption could only begin from the main build start date.

Members were informed that the revaluation response could take 3-6 months. The Rufus Centre report would be received sooner, and Officers would chase this with the advisor.

*Action: DTC*

- b. Members to receive any updates from Officers.

No items.

**25. Items for Consideration**

**a. General Reserves Policy**

It was **resolved** to adopt the updated General Reserves policy circulated.

**b. Draft Budget 2025-26**

Cllr Blazeby asked about any increases for allotments and the hiring of Millennium Park income budgets. The TC explained that both matters had been discussed at the Community Services Committee, and it was agreed that prices should be kept the same.

Cllr Blazeby asked for information about the difference in the electricity budget from 2024-25 to 2025-26 at the Youth Hub. The SFO explained that this figure was based on the schedule received from the utilities broker.

Cllr Snape referred to Ticketsolve costs and believed the fixed fee was £3k per year. The DTC advised that the annual cost was £5k.

The Chairman wanted to clarify a few points with the budget about 3 Station Road:

- The Council was not assuming rent from tenants of 3 Station Road next year – the DTC confirmed this was correct.
- He asked about marketing the site to prospective tenants – the DTC explained that Officers were meeting the agent next week to start the process. Officers had wanted to start this process earlier, before the construction work. However, professionals had advised that this would have been too premature for prospective tenants.
- The CCLA interest received budget was set to 0—the DTC confirmed this was correct. The Chairman commented that funds could be available to assist with the 3 Station Road refurbishment project.

Cllr Snape believed that the budget set for Proud AF was incorrect. Officers agreed to amend this figure; however, later in the meeting, the SFO advised that the right budget had been set based on a resolution.

Cllr Roberts asked about the IT budget. The TC explained that she and Cllr Harald had renegotiated the contract,, and both were happy with the budget figures presented.

Members were informed that the IT contract was due to expire in May, so this needed to be considered soon.

*Action: TC*

Cllr Blazeby referred to the RFO's report circulated as part of the exempt paperwork and asked if it could be discussed in the public section of the meeting. The DTC had asked for this item to be in the exempt section due to being unsure how much detail should be in the public domain. The DTC had no concerns about discussing the report in the public section.

### **Revenue Budget Pressures – item 10c**

Members noted the report circulated.

Cllr Blazeby asked about the increased insurance cost for next year. The DTC explained some of the increases related to the vacant unit at 3 Station Road, but these costs were counted as part of the project expenditure rather than impacting the Council's Precept. The insurance broker had provided increased estimates as part of the budgeting process. The Chairman commented that he expected insurance costs to rise.

Members were keen for any budget report published to explain that inflationary pressures had increased the precept, not the building work at 3 Station Road.

Members discussed the precept in general and agreed that residents would be receptive to a 2 or 3% rise. The TC commented that she had seen email exchanges showing comparisons of increases for other Town Councils that were much higher, e.g. Houghton Regis and Dunstable.

Cllr Blazeby suggested that the £89k increase in costs could be explained by unavoidable staff costs, maintenance, insurance, and business rates (excluding those for 3 Station Road). These were inflationary costs on key matters and meant the Council was not cutting services or staffing. He pointed out that the Council had made some cuts to the activities programme to keep costs reasonable.

Members discussed that the refurbishment at 3 Station Road was fully funded and did not impact the precept. The Council was confident about the upcoming capital receipt and agreed that the budget prepared was conservative. The TC advised that the solicitor would hold the 10% deposit payment on the Steppingley Road land sale.

Cllr Snape mentioned that the Community Services Team were doing more community work but fewer 'sessions' and advised that there had been a lot of grant funding success. Members noted that the Rufus Centre boilers would soon need to be replaced and that there were currently three office spaces vacant.

Members discussed the options of either a 2%, 3% or 4% rise in precept and agreed to pursue with a 3% increase following debate.

It was **recommended** that the Draft Budget 2025-26 be approved with a 3% rise in Precept.

## **26. Items for Information**

### **i) Finance Reports (Part 1)**

Cllr Blazeby asked about the year to date progressive surplus on the finance reports. The DTC explained that the formula had not been accurately input into the Excel document but confirmed that the progressive surplus up to 31<sup>st</sup> December was £77,551.

ii) **3 Station Road**

The DTC provided the following update:

- Marlow Builders were formally appointed following the decision at the December Council meeting. The standstill period then followed.
- The Chairman had reviewed the contractor's management accounts and confirmed that the financial risk had been reduced consequently.
- Works payments would be made monthly, and valuations/amounts, etc., for cash flow, were due to be discussed at the pre-start meeting the following day.
- Luton Borough Council's (LBC) Project Manager had confirmed that the Council could ask the contractor to provide monthly cash flow forecasts to understand the expected range of payments.
- The site set-up was due to start on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, the retail unit works were scheduled to begin on 20th February, and the restaurant unit work would commence on 27th March. If there were any amendments to these dates, they would be confirmed at the pre-start meeting.
- UKPN confirmed that legal consents were completed for the electricity cable works and that this job had been cleared for delivery. LBC was sending the technical information required to UKPN.
- Officers were due to meet the commercial marketing agents on-site the following week.
- Cash flow management was working fine, thanks to the swift reimbursement of the Community Ownership Fund grant for large payments to UKPN and the roofing contractor. The movement of funds to and from CCLA had been carried out with no issues.
- The finance schedule for the project included revenue costs not incorporated in the LBC budget for refurbishment (£16k), so the DTC explained that these costs would be separated in future reports.

The Chairman asked if the UKPN fee was included in the total project cost, as circulated in the reserves position document. The DTC confirmed that this was the case.

27. **Public Open Session**

No items.

28. **Exempt Items**

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

- a. Confidential Report – noted.
- b. Finance Reports Part 2 – noted.
- c. Revenue Budget Pressures – discussed in the public section of the meeting.
- d. Steppingley Road – noted.

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.

Signed ..... (Chairman)