

- The receipt of a contribution from the Wind Farm payments last year was referred to and a resident enquired whether a further payment had been received by the Town Council.

The Chairman confirmed that only one payment had been received although another was anticipated later in the year.

- The Chairman referred to seven questions submitted earlier that day from one resident concerning financial and budget matters and dealt with each question and answer in turn:

1. Christmas Lights budget of £16,000 for 2017/18

Expenditure recorded on this item in the schedule of payments over £500 for 2015/16 totaled marginally over £10,000. To date there has been no recorded expenditure on this item for the year 2016-17.

During those two years there was no specific amount detailed in the budget for Christmas lighting as it appeared under the general heading of 'Local Service Delivery'. In the budget for 2017-18 Christmas lighting has it's own budget head and this is £6,000 more than the last recorded spend of £10,000 in 2015/16.

Please can you explain the reason for this large percentage increase.

Christmas lighting expenditure is generally incurred in the New Year. This budget increase will allow for some replacement works within the street columns which must be carried out by the Street Lighting Authority NCC and is expensive and some new features may be obtained if the budget stretches that far.

2. Employee costs and contributions

The Finance Committee minutes of 14th December 2016 record an agreed 1% increase in salary for the Town Clerk. The figure in the budget for 2017-18 shows an identical figure for employee costs and contributions as that of 2016-17.

Does this mean the Town Council have not budgeted for the agreed increase and should the budget for 2017-18 be amended to accommodate this increase?

This is a budget figure and more than adequate to meet current liabilities. The Town Council is however undertaking a review of establishment and the future staff resources required and will make provision for this.

3. Colliery War Memorial

In the Council meeting of 13th January 2016 when last years budget was being considered I asked why no provision had been made in that budget for the care and maintenance of this Grade 2 listed monument. The minutes of that meeting record that the Council resolved to "seek expert advice and estimates for relevant work" Once again there is no provision in the budget this year for the care and maintenance of this memorial.

What expert advice has the Council sought since the resolution of January last year and have any estimates been obtained?

This matter was referred to County Neighbourhood Services Managers who I understand have taken advice. As owners of the Memorials they determined

to undertake a low pressure water wash and soft brush clean shortly before the Remembrance Services the cost of which is covered by the towns enhanced services arrangements.

4. Special Events Budget

In January 2016 I asked why the Triathlon was still being budgeted for when there was no event in 2015 and no event planned for 2016. The reply was:
“The organisers of the very successful Triathlon event advised the Town Council that they had insufficient capacity to run the event in 2015 but promised to review and see if it could be reintroduced in 2016 so the budget was retained to support that:
There was no Triathlon in 2015 or in 2016. There was no Garden competition in 2016.

Why are these two events still being budgeted for in 2017-18?

This is a budget for Special Events and while it has examples of events previously supported it is not limited to those whether or not they can be arranged. He was well aware of the local traders group detailed list of proposed events.

5. Town Centre Improvements

At the 2016 budget meeting I asked the following question:

“Please can you inform us why it has been necessary to introduce the entirely new budget heading of ‘Town Centre Improvements’ this year and what exactly is the new budget for it of ‘£20,000 is to be spent on? As this new area accounts for virtually all of the 9.6% increase in budget it is important to know why this is necessary and what it is for.”

The answer provided in the minutes of that meeting was:

“Members considered there was a need to respond to reductions in county services following increased complaints concerning litter, dog fouling etc. They wanted to ensure improvements in the town were still possible to maintain economic wealth and visitor attraction to the town. No specific schemes had yet been identified or considered”

Please can you tell us what schemes were identified in the current financial year specific to this budget and outwith the £15,000 additional allocation for Bay, Town and Gateway Environmental schemes since the only expenditure for both budget headings (total £35,000) currently recorded in the payments over £500 schedule is a total of £3,000 or 10% of these combined budgets - for Church Point rails, Horseshoe paving and beach sand redistribution.

Considering the current significant underspend and the fact the Finance Committee Minutes of 14.12.16 record that there are no planned reductions in Neighbourhood services budgets why has another £20,000 been allocated in 2017-18 for Town Centre Improvements? What specific schemes have been considered and costed for 2017-18 under this budget heading?

Again this is a budget provision for town improvements as may be deemed necessary. The beach sand redistribution was a trial as NCC had ceased such works that are likely to be necessary each year if we are to attempt to keep on top of one of our major assets the bay and promenade. The Town Council would review the impact of the scheme and see if it wanted to invest further.

6. The 2017-18 Budget

We are now 10 months into the current financial year and there are a number of budget headings which are either significantly underspent or haven't been and won't be spent at all and yet these budget headings and allocations are being carried forward without alteration to the next financial year. Why is this?

The Town Council is being recommended tonight to retain existing budget provision and schemes will be developed as the year proceeds depending on availability of resources.

7. Underspend

It would appear from the current actual and projected spend for this year that there will be a significant overall underspend on the 2016-17 budget.

Do the Town Council intend to utilise this in the current year, and if so, how or is it intended to carry this forward into the next financial year?

The Town Council at tonight's or future meetings will decide on the use of those balances.

C060/16 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor A Thompson

C061/16 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 09 November 2016 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

C062/16 MINUTES OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

The minutes of the meeting of the Finance Committee held on 09 December 2016 were received and approved subject to consideration of the budget recommendations later on the agenda.

C063/16 DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS No new interests were declared.

C064/16 DISPENSATION FOR MEMBERS TO SET THE PRECEPT

The Town Clerk explained the usual position relating to the involvement of members of the Council with local property interests taking part in the setting of the Precept and recommended that the precaution of issuing dispensations be taken.

RESOLVED that: all Members of the Town Council are granted a dispensation to take part in the setting of the Precept.

C065/16 PROPERTY TAX BASE FOR SETTING THE PRECEPT

The Town Clerk confirmed that the base figure advised by the county council for the purpose of calculating the Precept for 2017-2018 was 1,387.14 Band D equivalent.

RESOLVED that: the Property Tax Base figure of 1,387.14 was noted.

C066/16 BUDGET FOR 2017-2018

In relation to previous discussions and referring to the minutes of the meeting of the Finance Committee the Town Clerk outlined the report for the budget and precept for the next financial year which set out a range of options.

It was not proposed to increase the overall budgets although in order to cover a necessary increase in establishment it was recommended to add £20,000 to the administration budget pending the outcome of the current review by Members.

RESOLVED that: the Town Council Budget for 2017-18 be agreed at a total sum of £227,065 as set out in the Appendix.

C067/16 PRECEPT FOR 2017-2018

The Town Clerk advised that there were adequate balances available to make a contribution to the Precept and taking account of the new property tax base the Chairman proposed that there should be no increase in the amounts required in the property band payments for Precept.

RESOLVED that:

- i) An allocation of £27,700 from balances towards the budget was approved;**
- ii) The Precept for 2016-2017 was agreed at £199,365.**

Signed by the Chairman: Date:.....

BUDGET 2017.18	Budget
ADMINISTRATION	
Employees costs & contributions	57150
OFFICE/MEETING COSTS	
Rates; Utilities; Phone/IT;	5555
Room Hire; Printing; Stationery; Postage	800
Equipment & Furniture	100
Insurances	1500
FEES & CHARGES	5920
Audit Fees	750
Subscriptions – NALC	1000
Professional Fees	200
Publications	3500
Publicity	250
Bank charges	220
CIVIC & MEMBER EXPENSES	1350
Civic expenses; Councillors expenses; Training costs; Town Assembly	
SERVICE DELIVERY	40760
Enhanced Services (including cleansing Bus Shelters; Public Seating; War Memorials)	30000
Play Areas Inspections;	3295
Floral Bedding displays	7465
ASSET REPAIRS AND REPLACEMENTS Bus Shelters; Play Areas; Public Seats; Public Waste Bins; Facilities upgrade; The Bungalow	27500
ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECTS Bay Town & Gateway	15000
TOWN IMPROVEMENT SCHEMES	20000
SPECIAL EVENTS Gardens Comp/N in Bloom; (Triathlon); Music Progra	6000
Small Grants scheme	6000
Christmas Lighting	16000
Support Schemes	
Newbiggin Nipper service	2530
Children's holiday and leisure schemes	14400
Youth and adult support schemes	3000
Community volunteering support projects	2500
PROJECT FUNDING	
(Rocket House); (Events); Events Leaflet	1000
	227065