

STAMFORD TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF EXTRA ORDINARY STAMFORD TOWN COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 10 JANUARY 2024 AT 7pm AT STAMFORD TOWN HALL

PRESENT Councillor Andrew Croft (Chairman / Town Mayor)
Councillor Marion Pitt
Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing
Councillor Max Sawyer
Councillor Gloria Johnson
Councillor Amanda Wheeler
Councillor Lisa Brewin
Councillor Yvette Díaz- Muñoz
Councillor Rhea Rayside
Councillor Barry Devereux
Councillor Robin Morrison
Councillor Habib Rahman
Councillor Joanna Winterbourne
Councillor Bret Allibone
Councillor Shaun Ford
Councillor David Scammell
Councillor Jonathan Waples

ALSO PRESENT Town Clerk
1 member of public

611. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Point 2)

Councillor Breda-Rae Griffin, Councillor Kelham Cooke, Councillor Ed Fancourt and Councillor Jane Kingman submitted their apologies; the reasons were noted.

Proposal 1 - Councillor Andrew Croft proposed, seconded by Councillor Marion Pitt and unanimously **RESOLVED**, that the Council approves the reasons for absence.

612. DECLARATION OF INTEREST (Agenda Point 3) - None made.

613. TO CONSIDER THE NOTICE OF MOTION TO REVIEW THE COUNCIL'S BUDGET AND PRECEPT FOR 2024-25 (Agenda Point 3)

The Chairman advised that the meeting had been called in response to a Notice of Motion submitted by four councillors to review the Council's Budget and Precept for 2024-25. Each Councillor who had signed the Motion was invited to outline their concerns.

Councillor Bisnauthsing stated that his concerns over the proposed budget and precept was that it would overburden residents with increased Council rates, therefore each element within the budget should be reconsidered. In his view the increase in the number of employee was unjustifiable and unsustainable. Furthermore it was crucial the Council evaluate the necessity of such expansion, ensuring it is not overstaffed and that every new position serves a vital role within the service of the community.

The Chairman confirmed that the budgeted salaries and new appointments are fundamental to advancing Stamford's future growth and development. In respect of preparing the ground for re-establishing a museum in Stamford, this initiative had already been included within the Council's annual budget for several years past. As regards the matter of creating a formal strategy for the Council, it had been resolved this should progress and all members of the Council were invited to participate in the process.

Councillor Gloria Johnson supported the concerns outlined by Councillor Bisnauthsing. It was appreciated that the precept needed to be increased to cover the maintenance of the Special Expense Areas, which had been transferred from SKDC. But the increase was significant, and there must be elements within the budget which could be reviewed to reduce the increases. Councillor Johnson supported the museum initiative, but the cost within the budget is enormous; especially as the Council has yet to achieve Museum Accreditation status. It is recognised that funds for the Escape Room project had been earmarked, but could not some of these resources be used to offset some of the expenses, and could not some the costs be deferred to next year?

The Chairman, Councillor Croft, stated that the increase of 38% was for expenditure across all aspects of Council business, not just certain individual elements. The discussion is whether to review the budget as a whole and not just individual elements. In Councillor Croft's considered judgement there had been sufficient time allowed for Councillors to fully participate all discussions in respect of the budget. In addition, the last Town Council meeting went into Closed Session and a full and frank debate was held on this matter. It was then resolved to accept the budget and level of precept to be requested. Today's meeting is an opportunity to hear the subsequent concerns of four Councillors, who may not have found the opportunity to appraise themselves of the detail prior to the previous meeting. At the end of this meeting there will be a recorded vote to establish whether there is a Council wish to review the budget. This will conclude the discussion.

Councillor Habib Rahman considered the percentage increase on the Council Tax was too high and every effort should be made to try to reduce this increase.

Councillor David Scammell stated that he had signed the Notice of Motion as he strongly considered all members of the Council should take ownership and responsibility for the budget. It was recognised that the period before the Finance Committee meeting the Town Council meeting was short due to the Christmas holiday and some Councillors did not find sufficient time to digest the budget. He was strongly of the opinion that this budget delivered necessary extra services to the Town and covered the cost of assuming responsibility for the Special Expense Area assets. It is appropriate that the Council moves towards an enhanced expenditure projection in proposing to increase the level of staffing, the maintenance of its assets, providing a heritage museum and supporting other essentials such as climate action. Expenses need to be synchronised with the Council's strategy, and this budget is a step in the right direction. Once the budget is agreed we all need to move on. A new monthly reporting system is being considered, which may alleviate some of the concerns which have been articulated. The report will express how 'Reserves' are held and used while continuing to monitor the budget over the course of the year. It is incumbent on the Council to expend its resources wisely, as delivery of its actions is key. It is also important that the Council intelligently exploits new income stream opportunities.

It was suggested that the Council may wish to consider some activities, including staff recruitment, be undertaken by Councillors. The Chairman considered it imperative that such important services such as recruitment are undertaken under advice by professional specialists, and not by Councillors alone; but the point was noted.

Proposal 1 – It was proposed by Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing, seconded by Councillor Gloria Johnson, the Council **RESOLVED** to review its budget and precept for 2024 – 2025.

In Favour – Councillors Marion Pitt; Harrish Bisnauthsing; Max Sawyer; Gloria Johnson; Rhea Rayside and Habib Rahman (**6 votes**)

Against – Councillors Jonathan Waples; David Scammell; Shaun Ford; Bret Allibone; Jo Winterbourne; Robin Morrison; Barry Devereux; Yvette Díaz- Muñoz; Lisa Brewin; Amanda Wheeler; and Andrew Coft (**11 votes**)

Proposal 1 – Fell.

Proposal 2 – It was proposed by Councillor Barry Devereux, seconded by Councillor Jonathan Waples the Council **RESOLVED** the 2024 – 2025 Budget and Precept of £796,562.00 remains unchanged.

In Favour: Councillors Jonathan Waples; David Scammell; Shaun Ford; Bret Allibone; Jo Winterbourne; Robin Morrison; Barry Devereux; Yvette Díaz- Muñoz; Lisa Brewin; Amanda Wheeler; and Andrew Coft (**11 votes**)

Against: Councillors Marion Pitt; Harrish Bisnauthsing; Max Sawyer; Gloria Johnson; Rhea Rayside and Habib Rahman (**6 votes**)

Chairman
(Meeting closed at 7.30pm)