

Salisbury City Council

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Minutes

Meeting of : **FINANCE & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**
Date : **06 January 2025**
Meeting held in : The Guildhall, Salisbury
Commencing at : 6:30 pm

Present:

Chair: Cllr A Bayliss

Vice Chair: Cllr I Tomes

Cllrs: V Charleston, S Hocking, J Nettle, A Hoque, T Last, J Wells and T Corbin

Also Present: Cllrs A Riddle, C McGrath and J King; 1 member of the Press; and 1 member of the public.

Officers: Asa Thorpe, Steve Bishop and Penny Muxworthy

Apologies: Cllr R Rogers

The Chairman welcomed everyone saying that this meeting was being live-streamed. The meeting agreed to the Chairman's recommendation that Items 9 and 10 be taken in the order of 10 and 9.

1. Apologies:

Apologies were received from: Cllr Rogers - substituted by Cllr T Corbin

2. Public Questions/Statement Time:

There were no questions submitted from the public.

3. Councillor Questions/Statement Time:

There were no questions or statements submitted from councillors.

4. Minutes of Previous Meeting:

The minutes of the last meeting of the Finance and Governance Committee held on 28 October 2024 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

5. Declarations of Interest:

No declarations of interest were received.

6. Dispensations:

No dispensations were requested.

7. Chairman's Announcements:

The Chairman thanked all councillors for their attendance at and input to meetings over the past four years as this was the last F&G meeting in this council/civic year, and under this administration.

8. 2024/25 Budget Monitoring Report to end of October:

The Responsible Finance Officer presented the Budget Monitoring Report for 2024/25 year to the end of October 2024 and explained the Appendixes –

A detailing the split of cost centres by service committee – noting the figures shown are full- not part-year).

B detailing the October-end results for the Finance & Governance Committee cost centres – and showing the variances from approved budget.

C detailing the material variances over £50k – ie NI repayments, bank/investments interest and HR software licences. All these show less expenditure, or overachievement, against full-year budget figures.

The RFO will present the updated figures to end of November 2024 at next week's Full Council meeting.

It was Recommended and Resolved that the Committee:

8.1 Noted the financial position at the end of October and officers' explanation for the variances over £50,000.

8.2 Acknowledged the Council's current financial position, supporting officers to comply with Financial Regulations and where necessary pause services where finances have been exhausted in year.

Approved by all

10. Conservative Group's Proposed Budget and Medium Term Plan for 2025/26:

Cllr Nettle presented the Conservative Group's proposed Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan for the period 2025/26, and 2025-30, as shared in advance. He thanked

the CEO, RFO and all Officers for their time within discussions, giving a better understanding of the council's challenges.

Cllr Nettle highlighted that the Conservative's budget and MTFP was a budget of ambition, wanting to make a difference to residents of Salisbury.

Some of the significant differences included:

- £350k scheme to raise and protect Churchill Gardens car park in order to make it more commercially viable;
- £350k for a multi-use artificial pitch in the Bemerton area;
- £250k for a splash park;
- £20k for a 'stage' feasibility study;
- Average £40k annual increase in tree surgery budget;
- Closure of just one of the Council's most costly public conveniences, saving over £50k on average annually;
- Further reviewing the Council's cultural grants to rent reduction scheme to corporate tenants, and abolishing the £63k annual grants to the Salisbury Museum and Salisbury Playhouse;

Along with:

- £204k cost to resolve Wyndham Park walls – a lower budget figure and restructured schedule of works;
- Moving the job evaluation exercise to 2026/27 onwards;
- Reduction and phasing out of all councillor allowances.
- Clarifications sought and discussed included:
- Lack of conservative plans for Churchill Gardens car park.
- Challenges on costings around all-weather sports pitches.
- Lacking of detail on the Splash park.
- Reserves – Those present noted that the plan never reached the level of reserves needed by the council's own financial regulations.
- Current plans lacked information on how the opposition's budget resolves cyber security issues.
- Debate on whether a Parish Council should make arts funding.
- Although increases to tree surgery budgets, it was half of that proposed by the administration.

The Conservative Group Recommended and it was Resolved that:

10.1 Consider the Administration's 2025/26 Budget Proposal and Conservative Group's 2025/26 alternative Budget Proposal, including each political group's respective bids and savings, and each political group's proposed precept/Council Tax levels, directing technical questions to officers and political questions to group councillors.

10.2 Consider the 2025/26 fees and charges (attached to the Administration's Budget report) proposed by officers.

10.3 Make recommendations to Full Council to inform the statutory budget-setting decisions which must be taken at its meeting on 13 January 2025.

Proposed by: Cllr Hocking

Seconded by: Cllr Nettle

Defeated

9. Administration's Proposed Budget and Medium Term Plan for 2025/26:

Cllr Charleston presented the Administration Group's proposed Budget and Medium-Term Plan for the period 2025/26, and 2025-30, as shared in advance, thanking the CEO, RFO and all Officers for their time.

Cllr Charleston highlighted that this was a responsible and prudent budget.

Some of the notable items included:

- £300k cost to resolve Wyndham Park walls – reflecting accurate estimates already received;
- £250k annual full year effect of the results of a job evaluation exercise next year (ie Yr1);
- Reaching Reserves Policy compliance by Yr3;
- Provision of zero % precept/council tax rises in Years 4 & 5;
- £1.5m cost reductions/savings to be identified and delivered by officers over the five-year medium term;
- Closure of the Council's two most costly public conveniences, saving over £100k annually.

Clarifications sought and discussed included:

- Toilets closure – Market Square not usable, fit for purpose, and possibly unsafe;
- Commitment to address concerns of market traders;
- The Opposition stated that the budget lacked ambition.

The Administration Group Recommended that:

9.1 Consider the Administration's 2025/26 Budget Proposal and the Opposition's 2025/26 alternative Budget Proposal, including each political group's respective bids and savings, and each political group's proposed precept levels, directing technical questions to officers and political questions to group councillors.

9.2 Consider the 2025/26 fees and charges proposed by officers.

9.3 Make recommendations to Full Council to inform the statutory budget-setting decisions which must be taken at its meeting on 13 January 2025.

Amendment 1 Proposed that:

9.4 The Conservative Group's £20k Market Square Stage pilot be included in the Administration's Budget.

Proposed by: Cllr T Corbin **Seconded by:** Cllr T Last **Agreed**

Amendment 2 Proposed that:

9.5 The Conservative Group's £6k Consultation-with-residents budget be included in the Administration's Budget.

Proposed by: Cllr J Nettle **Seconded by:** Cllr S Hocking **Agreed**

Amendment 3 Proposed that:

9.6 The Administration do not close both toilets.

Proposed by: Cllr A Hoque No Secunder

Not debated

Substantive Motion Proposed that:

9.7 The Administration Group's Budget be accepted, with the inclusion of 9.4 and 9.5, above.

Proposed by: Cllr J Nettle

Seconded by: Cllr V Charleston

Agreed

11. Update Report on Full Codes Transition:

Steve Bishop, the RFO, gave a verbal update on this project, necessitated having moved to being a Principal Authority for accounting and therefore need to comply with their requirements (rather than the smaller authorities AGAR reporting). A specialist company will assist with the Full Code Transition, by the end of this financial year.

An Asset Valuation Contract is about to be issued – this will be the first such council-wide project and essential for evidence based decisions.

An external auditor had not been appointed. The sector is challenged and while proving difficult, NALC and others are working on ways to improve, including using the City Council as an example for re-setting Principle Authority rules. The outcomes will be shared with this committee when known.

The RFO confirmed there is no specific problems with having no external auditor except an affect on our credit rating and until such time as we may seek a Public Works Loan. The Secretary of State is considering options and could statutorily appoint an external auditor.

We still need to hold a Public Inspection period and concerns raised would be shared with an external auditor or other appropriate person/body. Council will be kept informed.

The Committee **Noted** this verbal report.

12. Matters, if any, which by reason of special circumstances the Chairman decides should be considered as a matter of urgency:

No matters were raised.

1 member of each the public and press were present.

The meeting closed at 8.03pm.