

WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM**18 January 2006**Attendance:Councillors:

Rees (Chairman) (P)

Bennetts (P)
 Berry (P)
 Beveridge (P)
 Davies (P)
 de Peyer (P)
 Higgins (P)
 Hiscock (P)
 Love (P)
 Mather

Maynard (P)
 Mitchell (P)
 Nelmes (P)
 Nunn (P)
 Pearce (P)
 Pines (P)
 Saunders (P)
 Tait (P)

Others in Attendance who Addressed the Meeting

Councillor Evans (Portfolio Holder for Culture, Heritage and Sport)
 Councillor Evans (Portfolio Holder for Healthy and Inclusive Communities)

Others in Attendance who did not Address the Meeting:

Councillor Beckett

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillor Mather.

2. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 23 November 2005, be approved and adopted.

3. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Mrs Mackintosh (City of Winchester Trust) spoke on Cittaslow and her comments were as set out in the relevant item below (WTF66 refers).

4. **WINCHESTER TOWN BUDGET 2006/07**

(Report WTF63 refers)

The Report set out several options for the Town Account tax level and Reserve balance and the Director of Finance advised that any increase in the Town Budget should not, when added to General Fund budget, result in a Council Tax increase of over 5%. If the Council Tax was set above this level it was likely to be capped by Government and this could incur the Council additional costs of approximately

£80,000 to £100,000 for re-billing etcetera. For this reason, the Forum therefore agreed to limit its budget increase to no more than 4.9%, which equated to a Town Account Council Tax of £49.05 at Band D.

The Forum considered each of the spending items as set out in Appendix 2 and Members noted that following the 2004/05 budget, there had been a change in the allocation of management overheads regarding the Recreation Grounds spending item.

Members also noted that the introduction of the Neighbourhood Wardens Scheme had been very successful (Report CAB1157 below refers). Following debate, the Forum agreed to recommend to Cabinet an increase of £25,000 on this item (total contribution £45,000) to increase the establishment of the Scheme and to attract further additional spending from the General Fund.

The Director tabled an additional Appendix to the Report which set out a revised series of options. These options extended those in the Report by demonstrating the effect of a £30,000 saving in the Recreation Grounds budget and a reduction in the level of Reserves. The Recreation Grounds budget was, at over £0.5m, by far the biggest spending item in the Town Account and, following debate, Members agreed that a target of achieving this £30,000 saving should be set whilst acknowledging that this could result in a reduction in the level of service.

In light of the urgent need to recommend a Town Account Budget to Cabinet by its meeting on 7 February 2006, the Forum delegated authority to the Director of Finance, in consultation with the Chairman, to investigate this potential saving and to recommend a Budget to Cabinet. In doing so, the Forum indicated its preference for Option 2 as set out on the additional Appendix, as this included the additional £25,000 (total spending £45,000) on the Neighbourhood Wardens. The Chairman agreed to circulate the relevant information supporting the recommendation to Members of the Forum.

During debate, Members noted that a detailed out-turn report on the Recreation Grounds budget would be presented to a future meeting.

With regard to the Forum's decisions to partially fund the Winchester Business Hub and the Winchester Business Improvement District Initiative (Reports WTF68 and WTF69 refer below), the Forum agreed that this should be drawn from the Town Account's Reserves. However, this would reduce the Reserves to less than £50,000 and the Director advised against reducing the level of reserves to too low a level.

RESOLVED:

That delegated authority be granted to the Director of Finance in consultation with the Chairman to recommend to Cabinet the Town Account Budget which account for:

- i) further investigation of a potential £30,000 saving from the Recreation Grounds Budget;
- ii) An additional £25,000 towards increasing the establishment of the Neighbourhood Wardens;
- iii) Reducing the Reserves by £10,000 to fund one-off payments for the Winchester Business Hub and the Winchester Business Improvement District Initiative;

5. **COMMUNITY GRANTS – REVENUE AWARDS 2006/07**
(Report WTF64 refers)

Councillor Higgins declared a personal and prejudicial interest in this item as a member of the committee of the Winnall Youth Club which had submitted a grant application. Councillor Higgins therefore left the room during the consideration of this item.

Councillor Pines declared a personal and prejudicial interest in this item as Chair of the Winnall Rock School which had submitted a grant application. Councillor Pines also declared a personal (but not prejudicial) interest as a Building Trustee of the Winnall Community Centre which had also submitted a grant application. Councillor Pines left the room during the consideration of both these items.

Councillor Tait declared a personal and prejudicial interest in this item as one of the Council's appointed representatives on the Carroll Youth Centre, which had submitted a grant application. Councillor Tait therefore left the room during the consideration of this item.

The Director of Development confirmed that the applications within the Report were the only ones received which were relevant to the Town Account and that the total amounts recommended in the Report were reflected in the Town Account Budget above (Report WTF63 refers).

During debate, the Forum noted that two of the applicants provided similar services and Members discussed, and rejected, proposing their possible amalgamation. In response to a Member's suggestion, Councillor Evans explained that whilst the Winnall Rock School at this stage served fewer children than the King Alfred Youth Activity Centre (and that this was not reflected in the similar level of grant awarded), the Rock School provided valuable benefits to the Council's policies of Social Inclusion through their performances at the Theatre Royal.

RESOLVED:

That it be recommended to Cabinet that the following revenue grants for 2006/07 be made from the Town Charge:

i)	Carroll Youth Centre	£5,000
ii)	King Alfred Youth Activity Centre	£5,000
iii)	Winnall Community Centre Playschemes	£5,000
iv)	Winnall Rock School	£5,000

6. **COMMUNITY GRANTS – CAPITAL AWARDS 2006/07**
(Report WTF65 refers)

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Collin suggested that if the Forum were minded to increase the capital grant award to the Weeke Community Association this could raise matching funds from the General Fund. The Committee therefore discussed increasing the grant from the recommended £3,500 to £7,000 and following debate, the majority of the Forum agreed that, although current budgetary restrictions precluded the additional award if further funding was available from the Town Account, the potential for this increased grant would be presented to a future meeting of the Forum.

RESOLVED:

That it be recommended to Cabinet that the following capital grants for 2006/07 be made from the Town Charge:

i)	St Faith's Parish Hall	£1,500
ii)	Weeke Community Association	£3,500

7. **WINCHESTER BUSINESS HUB**

(Report WTF68 refers)

The City Centre Manager summarised the case for the creation of the Winchester Business Hub as set out in detail in the Report. In response to questions, he explained that the contribution from the Town Account was sought as the Hub would be located in the town centre and would primarily (although not exclusively) cater for town centre businesses. He stated that in future years, the Hub was likely to be supported from the Winchester Business Improvement District (Report WTF69 below refers) and that for 2006/07 there were a number of partner organisations which had indicated a willingness to contribute to the scheme.

The Chief Executive added that Cabinet and the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Transport would consider at its 7 February 2006 meeting proposals for the Economic Development Budget, which could include a further contribution to the Hub.

Members noted that the Hub would provide expert and accessible advice to businesses from its participating partners and following debate, the majority of the Forum agreed the recommendations as set out. In light of Members' consideration of the Budget (WTF63 refers above), it was agreed that this one-off payment be made from the Town Account's Reserves.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet be recommended to approve in principle the contribution of £5,000 from the Reserves of the Town Account to establish a Business Hub in Winchester Town.

8. **WINCHESTER BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT**

(Report WTF69 refers)

The Forum considered the implications of an increased tax burden on the Council's properties and, in response to other questions, the City Centre Manager confirmed that any spending items arising from the scheme were likely to conform to Council priorities.

In light of Members' consideration of the Budget (WTF63 refers above), it was agreed that this one-off payment be made from the Town Account's Reserves.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet be recommended to approve the contribution of £5,000 from the Reserves of the Town Account to undertake the Business Improvement Districts (BIDS) process.

9. **NEIGHBOURHOOD WARDEN SCHEME - EVALUATION**
(Report CAB1157)

Councillor Collin introduced the Report which had been considered by Cabinet earlier that day. In summary, the evaluation had demonstrated that the Scheme had been a success and recommended that the service be expanded to meet current levels of demand and expectations, to comply with health and safety standards and to meet the best practice guidelines laid down in the national quality standard for warden schemes. He explained that if the current establishment of three officers (two wardens and one manager) were increased by one officer to four, it was unlikely that the Scheme could be successfully rolled out to new areas but this increase could improve the service provided to the areas already covered. If the establishment was increased by two additional officers to five, the additional pair of wardens could then patrol new areas of Winchester in pairs.

It was noted that a further report setting out the views of those that had used the Scheme and which evaluated its first full year of operation would be considered at a later meeting.

At the conclusion of debate, the Forum unanimously supported the Scheme and the proposal to increase its establishment by two wardens to five. Members expressed their thanks to the officers involved and, in particular to Mr Nigel Devon who had worked as a Warden from the Scheme's inception. However, in light of the budget constraints on the Town Account (as set out above, Report WTF63 refers) Members further agreed that it was not possible to fund this increase entirely from the Town Account alone.

RESOLVED:

That those involved in the Neighbourhood Wardens Scheme be congratulated for their good work and that the proposal to increase their establishment by two wardens to five be fully supported. However, whilst Cabinet be recommended to allocate an additional £25,000 from the Town Account (WTF63 refers), it was not possible to fund the additional posts from Town Account alone.

10. **ST FAITHS MEADOW**
(Report WTF67 refers)

RESOLVED:

That the Report be noted.

11. **CITTASLOW**
(Report WTF66 refers)

Councillor Davies declared a personal (but not prejudicial) interest in this item as a member of the Council of the City of Winchester Trust who had commented in support of the Council's membership of Cittaslow. Councillor Davies spoke and voted thereon.

Councillor Berry declared a personal (but not prejudicial) interest in this item as a member of the City of Winchester Trust who had commented in support of the Council's membership of Cittaslow. Councillor Berry spoke and voted thereon.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mrs Mackintosh (City of Winchester Trust) addressed the Forum in support of the Council's proposed membership of Cittaslow. She added that it may be possible for the Trust to make a financial contribution, should the Council decide to apply for Cittaslow membership.

Following discussion about the Forum's visit to Ludlow on 5 January 2006 (the UK's first Cittaslow accredited town), the Forum agreed to establish an Informal Group to consider further how the Council might adopt and develop the principles of the Cittaslow movement and work with the City of Winchester Trust to consider further options for membership. The membership of the Informal Group was agreed as Councillors de Peyer, Hiscock and Saunders and although the Group would have no officer-level involvement, representatives of the City of Winchester Trust would be invited to attend.

RESOLVED:

That an Informal Group be established to consider further how the Council might adopt and develop the principles of the Cittaslow movement and work with the City of Winchester Trust to consider further options for membership. The membership of the Informal Group was agreed as Councillors de Peyer, Hiscock and Saunders.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 9.55pm.

Chairman