

WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM**16 January 2007**Attendance:Councillors:

Rees (Chairman) (P)

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

Nelmes (P)
 Nunn (P)
 Pearce (P)
 Pines (P)
 Saunders (P)
 Stephens
 Tait (P)
 Worrall (P)

Others in Attendance who addressed the Meeting

Councillor Beckett (The Leader and Portfolio Holder for Economy and Tourism)
 Councillor Allgood (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources)

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillors Berry, Love and Stephens.

2. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Forum, held on 22 November 2006, be approved and adopted.

3. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no questions asked or statements made.

4. **WINCHESTER TOWN ACCOUNT BUDGET 2007/08**

(Report WTF86 refers)

The above item had not been notified for inclusion on the agenda within the statutory deadline. The Chairman agreed to accept the item onto the agenda as a matter requiring urgent consideration, in order that the Forum's recommendations could be fed into the budget process.

Councillor Allgood introduced the Report by explaining that a continuation of the Town Account's current budget was unsustainable, as it was dependent on the reserves. To produce a balanced budget, the Forum would either have to recommend to Cabinet that the Town precept be increased by 8%, or savings needed to be identified.

Councillor Allgood also highlighted to the Forum a proposed growth bid to meet some of the costs of the Theatre Royal from the Town Account. He requested that the Forum should also indicate its level of support for the continuation of the City Offices' Cash Office.

During debate, Members raised concerns with regard to the expenditure on the maintenance of bus shelters, playground safety inspections and footpath lighting.

A Member suggested that the Forum should consider Youth Community Wardens, similar to those used by Southampton City Council, and the Chairman agreed that this issue may be considered at a future meeting.

In response to questions, the Chief Executive explained that, if relocated to the Customer Service Centre, the Cash Office would still require specific facilities to handle cash, but there might be a future opportunity to share such a facility with the County Council or another of the Council's partners.

It was also explained that the current balance of commercial sponsorship of the Christmas Lights was satisfactory, but that the new BID (Business Improvement District) initiative might be a potential source of more income. Similarly, it was suggested that other schemes, such as the St Faiths Meadow Project, could be re-examined as to whether they could attract more support directly from the community.

The Forum also considered the potential for increasing the fees charged under the Town Account, particularly in respect of allotments, but the Director of Finance advised that this had already been carefully considered by officers and the Portfolio Holder.

At the conclusion of debate, the Forum agreed that more detailed information was required (particularly with regard to the largest spend item, Recreation Grounds and Open Spaces) before any recommendation to Cabinet could be made. It was therefore agreed to establish an Informal Group to investigate the proposed budget in greater detail and to make its recommendation, via the Chairman, to the 13 February 2007 meeting of Cabinet. The Chairman agreed to make the Informal Group's recommendations available electronically for comment from other members of the Forum, prior to the Cabinet meeting.

Several Members stated that the Informal Group should retain a sense of perspective and note that an 8% increase in the precept equated to less than a 5p a week increase on the Council Tax for a Band D property. They also advised that savings in the budget were likely to adversely affect services that town residents expected from the Council. During discussion on potential savings, the Forum also recognised that there might be little flexibility in the Recreation Grounds Maintenance Budget, because of the terms of contracts which had already been agreed.

However, following discussion, the Forum agreed that the Informal Group should aim to identify savings and recommend a budget that was sustainable and not reliant on the reserves, and that any increases were as close as possible to inflation.

RESOLVED:

1. That an Informal Group be established to review the Town Account 2006/07 Budget with officers, to identify savings and recommend a budget that was sustainable and not reliant on the reserves, and that any increases were as close as possible to inflation.

2. That the recommendation of the Informal Group be presented orally by the Chairman of the Town Forum to Cabinet, at its meeting to be held on 13 February 2007, following consultation with other members of the Forum.

3. That membership of the Informal Group be agreed as Councillors Hiscock, Mather and Pines.

5. **COMMUNITY GRANTS – REVENUE AWARDS 2007/08**
(Report WTF85 refers)

Councillor Higgins declared a personal and prejudicial interest as a member of the management committee of the Winnall Junior Youth Club, which had submitted a grant request. Councillor Higgins left the room during the consideration of this item.

Councillor Hiscock declared a personal and prejudicial interest as a member of the advisory committee of Winchester Trinity, which had submitted a grant request. Councillor Hiscock left the room during the consideration of this item.

Councillor Pines declared a personal and prejudicial interest as Chairman of the Winnall Rock School, which had submitted a grant request. Councillor Pines left the room during the consideration of this item.

Councillor Saunders declared a personal and prejudicial interest as the Council's representative on Relate, which had submitted a grant request. Councillor Saunders left the room during the consideration of this item.

The Forum noted an error in the Report, in that it did not reflect the Forum's terms of reference which allowed it to authorise grants from the Town Account, within the budget approved by Council in February each year. Therefore the Forum had the authority to determine the applications and need not make recommendations to Cabinet as the Report suggested.

During his introduction of the Report, the Director of Communities explained that there had been no applications for capital grants from organisations based in the Winchester town area for the period 2007/08. Therefore the £5,000 which had been given as capital grants last year was available for revenue grants.

In response to questions, the Director confirmed that the Council's accountants scrutinised the latest audited accounts of each of the applicant organisations. Grants were not released to organisations whose last audited accounts were more than 18 months old.

The Director explained that the Report differed to previous years' as it included all applicant organisations that provided a service to the town area.

Therefore, the Forum was asked to support an additional 17 organisations which had previously been supported only by the General Fund, so that the Forum's funding better reflected the approach to support that was sought from Parish Councils in the District. Although the Forum's grant budget had not increased and some of the recommended grants appeared very small, none of the organisations would receive less in grant from the Council as a whole, as these organisations would receive a balancing grant from the General Fund. Because of this, the Director explained that the applicants would be less dependent on the Forum's grants.

Members raised concern regarding Cabinet's commitment to provide this balancing grant from the General Fund. Therefore, it was agreed that the Forum's grants should be conditional on Cabinet's agreement of the proposed funding from the General Fund (as set out in Appendix 1) at its meeting on 13 February 2007.

In light of its discussion on the Town Account above, the Forum also discussed the possible uncertainty concerning the Town Account grants budget, but noted that the recommendation was subject to Council approval of the Town Account grants budget in February 2007.

RESOLVED:

1 That the Forum approve the following revenue grants, subject to Council's approval of the Town Accounts budget on 28 February 2007 and Cabinet's approval of the balancing revenue grant funds (as set out in Appendix 1 of WTF85) at its meeting on 13 February 2007:

- (i) Carroll Centre - £500
- (ii) Hat Fair - £3,400
- (iii) Home Start Winchester - £500
- (iv) King Alfred Youth Activity Centre - £500
- (v) Nightshelter (Winchester Churches) - £400
- (vi) Olive Branch - £100
- (vii) Relate - £500
- (viii) Streetreach (Winchester Detached Youth Group)- £850
- (ix) Tower Arts Centre - £2,100
- (x) Trinity Winchester - £3,350
- (xi) Trinity Winchester (Women's Centre) - £300
- (xii) Winchester Carer Centre - £100
- (xiii) Winchester Citizens Advice Bureau - £9,500

- (xiv) Winchester Festival - £200
- (xv) Winchester Folk Festival (MAYfest) - £100
- (xvi) Winchester Live at Home Scheme - £550
- (xvii) Winchester Young Carers - £200
- (xviii) Winchester Youth Counselling - £250
- (xix) Winnall Community Centre - £500
- (xx) Winnall Junior Youth Club - £100
- (xxi) Winnall Rock School - £500

2. A separate grant of £500 be awarded to the Stanmore Combined Group, on terms to be agreed by the Director of Communities, in consultation with the Chairman of the Forum.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 9.05pm

Chairman