

FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT

May 2016

Finance

Budget

Council expenditure for 2015/16 was broadly in line with the agreed budget spend for that year, the main capital expenditure being for toilet refurbishment. These works are not yet finished so there will be a cost for completion works carried forward into this current financial year.

Moving forward, the budgetary aim for this year will be to promote a more disciplined approach to expenditure in line with the budget proposals, particularly in view of changes introduced following the recommendations of the Council Review resulting in a level of financial authority being delegated to committee level. With this objective in view, and to give greater clarity, the budget for this financial year has been split to a greater degree into its component parts.

Clarity in Accounts

In line with the objective to develop greater budgetary control, efforts have been made during the course of 2015/16 to provide a greater degree of clarity in the financial accounts and the level of detailed financial information available to councillors, in order to promote a more robust decision making process in respect of the Council's business activities. Whilst some progress has certainly been made in this area, it is a 'work in progress' and such work will continue in this financial year in order to reach a satisfactory 'financial reporting' position.

Of particular note, efforts have been made during the course of the financial year to provide a greater degree of clarity regarding the financial position and financial viability of the TIC as a 'stand alone' business activity.

Annual Audit Return & Issues

The foregoing comments should be understood in the context of the necessity for continual improvement in respect of the Council's Governance activities.

Issues were raised when the Annual Audit Return for 2014/15 was submitted to the external auditors early in the 2015/16 Civic Year. This resulted in a Council initiated investigation into the accuracy of the accounts for preceding years. The investigation uncovered a number of accounting discrepancies which were duly corrected and a new independent Internal Auditor was appointed.

Moving forward, a suitably qualified auditor (separate from the appointed Internal Auditor) has been engaged by Council to check and advise upon the accounts for 2015/16 prior to the Annual Audit Return being submitted.

Internal Audit Council Member Checks

During the course of the 2015/16 financial year, in compliance with the Financial Regulations, routine audits/checks by a nominated Council Member were introduced. The Council Member's audit/checks are not restricted to any specific area but are intended to broadly cover all of the Town Council's business activities and delivery of services.

The audits/checks completed by the nominated Council Member are routinely reported to the Finance and General Purposes Committee. Thanks to Cllr Chris Rose for agreeing to be the nominated Council Member and for undertaking the audits/checks in a very thorough manner.

Policies and Procedures

Standing Orders, Policies & Procedures

Work has continued during the course of the year on the Town Council's Standing Orders, Policies and Procedures.

Standing Orders have been routinely updated and currently reflect the Council's statutory responsibilities and community obligations and actions have been taken to ensure compliance, particularly with the Financial Regulation.

New policies have been introduced and existing policies have been routinely reviewed to ensure that the Council's business activities are reflected in, and covered by, adequate governing documentation.

Work commenced during the 2015/16 Civic Year on developing documented Administration Procedures that offer a check on the adequacy of existing administrative practices.

Changes to the Council's banking procedures are currently being introduced with a move to 'online banking' and internet access to the Council's Current Account to facilitate the payment of invoices and salaries etc.

Website

A new website was introduced during the year allowing Council information to be more fully and more clearly presented in the public domain in compliance with the Local Government Transparency Code 2014. Thanks to Cllr Chris Rose for his support in getting the website up-and-running and for his work in ensuring that it has been populated with all the appropriate information.

The website content is now maintained and managed 'in-house' by Town Council staff rather than employing an external webmaster for that specific task. Many thanks to Annette for managing the website and keeping it up-to-date.

Alongside the implementation of the new website a 'Facebook' account was opened and Council news and general information is additionally promulgated in the public domain using social media. Thanks to Laura for monitoring and managing the Facebook account.

Summary

Key to the progress made during 2015/16 (in respect of Council activities under the remit of the Finance and General Purposes), has been the drive for continual improvement. As the term suggests, improvement must be ongoing and the achievements of 2015/16 should not be seen as an end in themselves but simply as building blocks for the future as we move forward and enter a new Civic Year.

Thanks to all on the Finance & General Purposes Committee for their support during the year and their efforts in progressing the many changes that have been implemented.

Cllr Roy Hendy

Chairman

May 2016