**Minutes of the SPC Finance Committee held on Thursday 21St September 2023 at 7pm at the Civic Hall, Uppermill.**

**Present**: Councillors: S. Al-Hamdani (Chairman)

G. Sheldon

L. Dawson

K. Dawson

K. Barton

RFO: J Price; Clerk: K Allott

**574. Apologies for Absence:** Cllrs K. Phillips, R. Blackmore, P. Walsh, H. Bishop

**575. Declarations of interest:**

Cllr K Dawson pecuniary interest declared on item 9, Chairman’s Allowance

Cllr L Dawson pecuniary interest declared on item 9, Chairman’s Allowance

**576. Minutes from the last meeting on Thursday 20th April 2023.**

These minutes were accepted as correct and signed off at the meeting by the Chairman.

**577. Minutes from the Extraordinary meeting on Monday 7th August 2023**

These minutes were accepted as correct and signed off at the meeting by the Chairman.

**578. Year End Audit Update**

The RFO shared copies of the letter he had received from the Internal Auditors TPA with their assurances that although the deadline had been missed, everything was in order. He advised that all was published as required on the website and he expected the External Audit report to be signed off by the end of next week and the Conclusion of Audit would then be posted on the website with the missed deadline declared.

Cllr Sheldon asked whether the delays we had experienced the last two years in submitting the data were likely to happen next year?

The RFO confirmed that measures were now in place to ensure we would hit the deadlines next year.

Cllr Al-Hamdani advised that the Finance Committee were meeting monthly to ensure we are on track to meet these deadlines.

**579. New Banking Quotes/Arrangements**

The RFO explained to councillors the reasons why we wished to change banking provider. After doing analysis and research he believed Unity would be a good fit for us. There was some discussion around this and the service they would provide.

Councillors had the following questions:-

How easy is it to set up mandate signatories, if there isn’t a local branch to visit. How easy is it to change these?

Is it easy to speak to the bank in person if we have queries/concerns?

Exactly what services will they provide?

How do we deposit cash amounts, is it via the Post Office?

What are the charges? How do these compare to our current provider?

It was agreed the RFO would present a summary answering these questions at the next meeting and a decision could then be made.

**580. Energy Contract**

The RFO explained to Councillors that our 3 year fixed term energy contract had ended in June 23 and he had completed a full benchmarking analysis to get the best deal for us. Taking this analysis into account, and to ensure we weren’t moved to the more expensive variable tariff from 8 June 23, the decision was taken to proceed with the most competitive quotes - EDF for gas and British Gas for electricity, both on a two year fixed rate.

After some discussion councillors asked for a brief report to be shared at the next meeting with comparisons based on the basic unit price/price per therm plus standing charges.

**581. Payroll Provider Update**

The RFO explained to Councillors that our current payroll provider had given notice they would no longer be providing payroll services from October. He had done a benchmarking analysis and it had been decided to move to a local company, Seftons, who were actually cheaper per month than the original provider (£48 per month as opposed to £55 per month).

There was some discussion around this and councillors asked for the a brief summary report to be shared at the next meeting.

Councillors advised that they must be kept fully informed in advance of any proposed changes to contracts/SLAs that are above the Clerk’s delegated authority amount, as they should be involved in the decision-making process.

**582. Budget 2024-25 Planning**

Cllr Al-Hamdani explained the deadlines from OMBC which inform our budget setting; that they have to sign off in March so they require our agreed budget information to be approved at the our Full Council meeting in January; February at the very latest.

The Clerk was asked to add the Budget Proposal heading to the next meeting agendas of the Assets Management, Communications and Environment Committees so these figures can be added into the overall budget preparation.

Cllr Al-Hamdani requested that the RFO present at the next meeting a Precept sensitivity calculation, based on the current number of households.

The additional costs incurred from the By-election were discussed. The RFO advised the estimated joint costs of the May election and the November By-election would mean there would be an overspend on the reserves already allocated of approx. £2k-£3k.

**583. Chairman’s Allowance**

The Clerk advised that this had been added to the agenda by request of the Vice Chairman. There was some discussion around this.

The Clerk said she believed we should be keeping a record of expenditure of this allowance for transparency reasons, Cllr Sheldon agreed and there was some discussion around this. The RFO agreed stating that by monitoring it would also be in a better position to decide whether it needed to be increased next year. The current Chairman’s allowance is being recorded by the Clerk.

A copy of the minutes of a Task & Finish Group dated 30th April 2021 were shared with Councillors:-

“It was resolved at this meeting to put forward a proposal to the Parish Council that the Chairman’s allowance would remain at its present level, but that the allowance be distributed as follows:

£1000 to the Chair; £750 to be used for mileage claims at 45 pence per mile (as per HMRC) and towards any out of pocket expenses from the Deputy Chair”.

This proposal was not taken to the Council at the the time so no changes had been made to the standing orders/financial regulations.

It was agreed that any decisions made would not take place until May 24 but informal arrangements could be made between the current Chairman and Vice Chairman regarding incurred expenditure during this current year.

After further discussion it was resolved that this would be added to the agenda for the October Council meeting. (Cllr Al-Hamdani agreed to send a resume of the proposal to the Clerk).

**584. Items for the next agenda**

External Audit Update

Budget 2024-25

Precept Estimate 2024-25

Proposed Change of Banking Provider Report

Energy Contract Analysis/Comparison Report

New Payroll Provider Report

Civic Hall Carpark Wall (from Assets Management Committee)

**Date of next meeting: Thursday 19th October 2023 @ 19.00hrs**