

Droitwich Spa Town Council

TOWN MEETING 15 MARCH 2021

Report of the Resources Committee

The principle role of the Resources Committee is to consider all matters that affect the finances of the Town Council. In my role as Chair, working with the Vice Chair – Councillor AM Sinton and my fellow Committee Members - I can confirm that Droitwich Spa Town Council has, and will, continue to maintain a prudent approach to the financial affairs of the town.

The Town Council owns and maintains St Richard's House comprising the Heritage Centre and Museum, the Community Hall, two parks (Spring Meadow/Door Step Green and Copcut Park), 4 Allotment Sites comprising over 100 individual plots, together with various bus shelters, infrastructure and street furniture in the town. It also contributes to the upkeep of St Mary de Witton Churchyard and makes additional grants through the Resources Committee (to the Citizens' Advice Bureau and the Council for Voluntary Services). Community grants and sponsorship are invited and considered in association with the Community & Amenities Committee throughout the year. The first Grants Appraisal Committee meeting of the next Municipal Year takes place on 7 June 2021.

The Town Council has very limited reserves to carry out its functions and services as well as maintenance of the land holdings, buildings and public equipment within its ownership. Town and Parish Councils, which are not principal Councils (Local Government Act 1972), do not receive any grant from the Government. The Town Council relies solely for its income upon the precept and, hopefully the Precept Support Grant from Wychavon District Council together with a small element coming from office tenancies, room hire income, retail sales, fees and charges. For 2020/2021 the precept was set at £420,869 (£384,750 precept requirement + £36,119 precept support grant). The budget requirement for the forthcoming year 2021/2022, including the grant element, is £436,259 (£400,140 precept requirement + £36,119 grant element), an increase of 3.9%. This gives a Band D property increase from an annual council tax of £48.32 to £47.06, an amount of £1.74 per annum.

The Town Council continues to review the way in which it sponsors the many major events and festivals taking place within the Town and ways in which it can deal with the increasing pressure to support both existing and new events even more so as a result of the pandemic. Last year the Council gave financial assistance in the amount of £7,500 the vast majority of which was used to support the community during the pandemic provided by our community service organisations and a multitude of volunteers. For the forthcoming year a total of £5,000 (with additional consideration of a further £2500 if there is sufficient demand) is being made available for financial support to the community via the Community Grants Appraisal Panel. Details are available on the Town Council's website and we look forward to many more varied and interesting applications from within our town.

Having allocated £15,000.00 over two years to the National May Flower 400 Commemorations and specifically a free access Community Event which should have taken place on Saturday 4 July 2020, it was with great but understandable regret that the event had to be cancelled; as we emerge from the pandemic, the Town Council will continue to look at ways an event of some description can be facilitated.

The Town Council was still able to organise Christmas illuminations this year although not in the manner of previous years. I would like to take the opportunity of thanking Sharon Abbott, one of our Assistant Town Clerks, for all her hard work and diligence in managing this in such difficult circumstances.

Whilst we were not able to hold our usual programme of Band Concerts in 2020, it is hoped, as restrictions ease, we will be able to return these in 2021. The Resources Committee stands ready to support the Community & Amenities Committee in providing a suitable budget for these free Concerts which are well received and supported by the public and will be even more important in our post-Covid recovery.

Referrals and support for Wychavon District Council funding initiatives have featured strongly during 2020/2021. Applications within the Community Legacy Grant Scheme have been made for developments at King George V Playing Fields and for a Heritage Trail Project both of which the Town Council think will be of enormous benefit to the town. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Town Clerk, Mark Keld and his team for all of their hard work on these bids and to my fellow Town Councillors for their unanimous and unequivocal support for both projects. It also gives me a great deal of pride to confirm the completion of the Droitwich Spa High School – Community Cabin Project and again express my thanks to Mark and the team for the hard work done on this under difficult circumstances. The Town Council was able to complete its planting project at the front of St Richard's House despite the challenges presented by Covid-19 which is again a testament to the hard work of our staff.

The Committee has reviewed all relevant policies such as Financial Risk Management, Financial Regulations & Standing Orders and Internal Controls and we now use the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) own regulations as our guidelines in doing this. The Internal Auditor has undertaken interim and financial year end reviews of controls and procedures and I am pleased to report that, at this time, standards remain high with robust controls in place. I am especially grateful to Mrs Jane Greenfield - Assistant Town Clerk - Civic, Finance & Administration for her hard work and diligence which are instrumental in maintaining these high standards.

The Committee continues to review and identify ways in which short, medium and long term repairs and maintenance are to be financed and a schedule of maintenance and improvement works continues. This covers all Town Council assets including premises, land holdings, fixtures and fittings. The Town Council continues to maintain two lease hold arrangements with valued tenants for office space and facilities at St Richards House.

This has been a difficult year for everyone so I am proud to report that the Town Council's finances remain in a healthy state despite the many challenges we have faced as a result of the pandemic. Further, the External Auditor raised no negative findings last year. Local Government finances always face many challenges which become even more of a challenge when faced with a pandemic and an uncertain road to economic recovery.

I am confident that the Town Council in exercising and continuing to exercise the diligence it has shown will rise to those challenges for the benefit of the residents of our town.

My thanks go to Councillor AM Sinton - Vice Chairman and all members of the Resources Committee for supporting me in my role as Chairman. I would also again like to thank the Council's Officers – Mark, Sharon and Jane for their invaluable work in maintaining and monitoring the Council's resources and for their personal support provided to me in my role as Chair.

Councillor Alan Humphries

Chair of Resources Committee