# Droitwich Spa Town Council

# TOWN MEETING 13TH MARCH 2023

**Report of the Resources Committee**

The principle role of the Resources Committee is to consider all matters that affect the assets, finances and resources of the Town Council. As Chairman working alongside Vice Chairman Councillor Mrs K Fellows I confirm that Droitwich Spa Town Council continues to follow a prudent approach to economies & finance and maintain high standards of governance.

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. Contractors are engaged to provide and maintain year round Municipal Planting and the Annual Festive Lighting at Christmas. 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

Budgets, Precept & Reserve Positions

Budget provision is split between the Community & Amenities and the Resources Committees for different cost centres and responsibilities. The Town Council has very limited resources to carry out its functions, responsibilities and services as well as maintenance of 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 for its income upon the Precept and the Precept Support Grant from Wychavon District Council, together with an element of supplementary revenue derived from office tenancies, Community Hall room hire, retail sales and fees & charges. For the past three Municipal periods the precept requirement has been maintained at £400,140 (+ £36,119 for the static support grant element). This has meant that the combined total operational budget of £436,259 has also been maintained for the same periods (2021/22, 2022/23 & set for 2023/24). This in turn has meant only a very marginal Council Tax variance for the Electorate which is attributed entirely to the tax base calculation. This calculation is not within the Town Council remit of influence. The Band D property Council Tax element value for the Town Council for the period 2023/24 is £46.56 which is considerably less than the National Average and many Peer Councils. The tax base variance has resulted in only £ 0.26 pence increase for the year with no additional precept request submitted to WDC. Two years of operational disruption attributed with the Pandemic from March 2020 and the more recent energy sector and general economic uncertainty have been effectively managed up to now. A prevailing balanced, best value and frugal approach during these difficult times, now spanning a three year cumulative period, has ensured no detrimental impact on the Town Council financial position. There has been no requirement to draw on reserve balances and these are maintained above the recommended threshold level (minimum 50% of precept value). The economic situation has recently improved potential return rates for investment due to base rate increases. This is an important consideration to be taken forward by the Town Council in the early part of the New Administration after May 2023. For the main part residual rises in service and operational costs incurred by the Town Council are being absorbed within the budgeted provision and supplementary income generated with no current shortfalls. This includes rises within the utility and energy costs so far. These approaches accord with similar considerations & measures being taken forward by Worcestershire County Council and Wychavon District Council.

Grant Awards Scheme (within the remit of the Community & Amenities Committee).

The Town Council continues to review the way in which it sponsors the many events and festivals taking place within the Town each year, including ways to deal with the increasing pressure to support both existing and new projects. Last year financial assistance by way of grant support through the Community & Amenities Committee was given for the amount of £5,000 towards local groups and projects. The same value fund is allocated for consideration of applications in the period 2023/24. Details are available on the Town Council’s website and we look forward to many more varied and interesting applications from within our town. The first Grants Appraisal Committee meeting of the next Municipal Year takes place on 5 June 2023. Business purposes are not eligible for consideration for the Community Grant Scheme awards unless the applicant is a designated Community Interest Company (CIC) or has Registered Charity Status.

Project Delivery, Scope and External Sources of Funding

Significant projects delivered to plan and within budget during 2022 included Her Late Majesty the Queens Platinum Jubilee celebrations in June. Two Community Legacy funded projects were fully signed off within budget and to plan in November for the new King George V Sports Pavilion and the development & launch of the Heritage Town Trail App.

Funding for local Jubilee street party events was coordinated during June 2022 helping to allocate special funding provided by Wychavon District Council. This enabled 16 separate local community gatherings to receive a contribution towards their planned celebrations. It is hoped that a similar arrangement may take place in May 2023 to support local gatherings for the Coronation Celebrations for King Charles III during the 6 to 8 May weekend . Further details will be publicised when available.

A key Strategic Project for the Town Council proceeding from resurrection in July 2022 is the Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP). The focused and informed approach now being taken has secured Locality (Government) grant funding to cover professional Consultant costs and additional Technical Support work streams provided by the Government Contractor – AECOM. Close collaboration with Wychavon District Council Planning and WCC is enabling a balanced & economic approach to be taken for the project, including support in kind, transferable content material and some additional externally sourced funding contributions. This represents considerable value that the current position is virtually cost neutral, aside from staff resourcing provision.

External funding has been acquired with the support of County Council Elected Members from Divisional Fund allocations. These funds have been used towards various public realm and improvement projects for the community. The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner has successfully been approached to apply for and secure grant awards to purchase and match fund Solar Vehicle Activated signs (VAS), as part of the local community speed watch campaign.

Governance & Risk Management

The Committee has reviewed all relevant polices such as Financial Risk Management, Financial Regulations & Standing Orders and Internal Controls and we now use the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) recommended regulations as our principle 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 – Deputy Town Clerk - Civic, Finance & Administration for her hard work and diligence which are instrumental in maintaining these high standards year on year.

Risk Management and Due Diligence extends further with responsibilities for tenancies, lettable office space, public realm land, two public buildings and the arrangements for organising numerous Town Events and occasions. A full review of Health and Safety and inspection regimes takes place in August every year. Event arrangements are all subject to preparation of risk assessments, method statements and confirmation of suitable public liability insurance cover. These responsibilities often involve strong collaboration with Peer Councils and other Agencies including the emergency services, Regulatory & Licencing and Health Care providers. The Town Council has good working relationships with the Internal and External Auditors which provide guidance and the standards to maintain good governance in the Local Government Sector. These standards are comprehensive and include operations, banking & finance, employer’s responsibilities, all Risk’s mitigation and VAT reconciliation. During the past year the procurement process has been followed for the renewal options for the Municipal Planting contract and will be used again for the Christmas Lights arrangements which are scheduled for review in 2023.

Local Government finances always face many challenges which become even more important considerations when faced with the pandemic, global conflict and an uncertain road to economic recovery.

Staffing

Within staffing matters Mrs Rebecca Pye re-joined the Heritage Manager Team in June 2022 bringing valuable Museum Sector experience and stability for the running of the Centre. The Accredited status for the Museum is currently being renewed following Becky’s appointment working with Catherine. Sharon moved from the Town Council Officer Team in July following a 4 year term. Katy joined the team in late October 2022 which now brings the staffing allocation up to date. A full review of roles, responsibilities and salaries has been completed in July 2022.

Projects and Strategic Priorities

The Town Council continues to be an active key stakeholder on significant WDC projects. Progress with the “West and Beyond Underpasses” - public art murals initiative has been regularly reported. This project is nearing completion and the final underpass at the Railway Station is expected to be finished this month. The WDC Place Board is taking many new ideas and initiatives forward and the Town Clerk represents on behalf of the Town Council.

Many work streams and projects continue to progress following the disruption of the pandemic period. These are summarised as part of the report on budgets & finance produced in January to support consideration for the precept. Key initiatives which the Town Council expects to move further forward this year with the New Administration in place from May include,

1. Some modernisation, refurbishment and improved scope for the Heritage Centre and Museum.
2. Business hub and additional lettable Office space facilities for the second floor at St Richards House.
3. Further progress with the Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) working to the Consultants outlined schedule.
4. Consideration for land use and asset disposal options for the Kidderminster Road land holding.

Within innovation the recording and filming of all Town Council and Committee Meetings at St Richards House commenced from November 2022 for monitoring purposes. It is anticipated that a live stream option will be available for all meetings using the You Tube method from June 2023.

Savings and efficiencies are continually monitored including energy options. An application was registered and confirmed in late 2021 for the “Zero Carbon Ready Worcestershire Decarbonisation Review” through the Public Sector Energy Efficiency Programme (PEEP). This work covers both owned and maintained buildings – the Community Hall and St Richards House. The review findings and recommendations from May & September 2022 have been presented. Feasibility Options for Solar PV, without battery storage and LED, including upgrades and smart provision have been considered in full. The option to proceed for the LED work is in course and includes an anticipated 40 % PEEP Grant contribution. It is hoped that this will be finalised and in place for May 2023. A mandate to proceed has also been resolved to upgrade and replace the gas boiler for St Richards House through the summer of 2023. This is expected to provide significant benefits, efficiencies & savings for costs, energy consumption and reduced carbon emissions. The existing boiler has been in place for approximately 45 years.

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 maintains two lease hold arrangements with valued tenants for office space and facilities at St Richards House on the first floor.

Closing Remarks

This has been a further difficult time for everyone with the cumulative impact of the pandemic, global conflict and prevailing economic challenges now spanning over three years. Despite these factors I am pleased to report that the Town Council’s finances and business operations remain robust and in a healthy condition.

I am confident that the Town Council is exercising and maintaining good standards of due diligence & governance and will continue to rise to all challenges and provide best value benefitting the Town, its residents and visitors.

My thanks go to Councillor Mrs Kate Fellows - Vice Chairman and all members of the Resources Committee and fellow Councillors for supporting me in my role as Chairman. I would like to thank the Council’s Officers –Katy, Jane & Mark for their work in maintaining and monitoring the Council’s resources and for their personal support provided to me in my role as Chairman.

Councillor WT Moy

Chairman of Resources Committee.

March 2023.