

# Gerrards Cross Town Council

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## Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting held 7 pm on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> November 2021 at Gerrards Cross Memorial Hall

**Present:** Cllr J Chhokar (Chairman), Cllr N Barnett, Cllr M Bracken, Cllr C Da Costa, Cllr S Davey, Cllr T Greenfield, Cllr B Holborn, Cllr J O’Keeffe, Cllr P Roberts, Cllr Stuart-Lee and Cllr A Wood

**In Attendance:** Sue Moffat (Town Clerk).

1. *Declaration of interests are requested at the beginning of each item.*
2. **To accept apologies of absence** – None.
3. **The Minutes of the meeting of 13<sup>th</sup> October, 2021** were agreed after amending Minute 8, to consider applications for Grants for GXCA to include: -‘a £25k grant was agreed for the specific project of the ‘*Fire Escape*’ .....’.
4. **To first decide an overall level of precept acceptable to Gerrards Cross Town Council** – The precept/budget proposed at the F&GP meeting of 13<sup>th</sup> October was 15.4%. Different scenarios of budget level were presented at this meeting from 15.4%,12.5%,10%, 5%,2.5% 0%. The Chairman, Cllr Chhokar, asked for councillors’ views on the different levels of precept/budget.
  - Cllr Wood - According to his rates bill, a 15% increase next year would be equivalent to about 36p a week which is a miniscule amount for the level of service provided by the Town Council. After speaking to residents, residents are expecting the Town Council to ‘get things done’ so he believes a 15% increase would be value for money.
  - Cllr Barnett – Agreed 15%.
  - Cllr Davey – 15% increase agreed but it would be beneficial if the rate payer sees not only the percentage increase but the monetary value as well.
  - Cllr O’Keeffe – Agreed 15%. The council tax bill should show the percentage increase and what this relates to in monetary terms. An increase agreed as inflation is higher than previous years, 4.6%, and there will be other inflationary costs funding future projects.
  - Cllr Bracken – Buckinghamshire Council are looking at 3-4% increase. He would recommend staying in the 5% range increase for next year.
  - Cllr Roberts – Agreed 15%.
  - Cllr DaCosta- He would disagree with a perpetual increase of 15% each year but agree with a one off 15% increase and explain to the rate payer the benefits of the increase.
  - Cllr Holborn – He finds this a big responsibility as it is the rate payer funding this and everyone values money differently. In context, inflation will rise this coming year with high energy costs, NIC contributions, and this all effects the local tax payer. He accepts

GXTC have a lot of projects to complete. After studying town and parish precepts nationally, GXTC is in the top 8% highest precept level. Studying the precept levels presented with the agenda, GXTC has had an average 4.8% in the past. 15% is unprecedented and he is not comfortable with this. He would recommend not more than the rate of inflation.

- Cllr Greenfield - 15% is too high.

- Cllr Chhokar –

At this point Cllr O’Keeffe asked if Cllr Chhokar should declare an interest in the process of setting the precept being the Campaign Manager for Joy Morrissey MP. The Town Clerk’s advice was that she believed that no declaration of interest was required as there was no political motive, and all members of the Town Council stood as Conservative candidates who are part of this decision making process. The remaining Councillors agreed no declaration of interest was required by Cllr Chhokar. Cllr Chhokar went on to present his recommendation that the precept should not increase by more than 5%.

- Cllr Peck – He appreciated the views of fellow councillors and recommended 7.5% increase to have a buffer as uncertain territory.

There were further discussions about the expectation of residents regards the provision of good services by GXTC which therefore needs more funding, any increase in precept to be presented in monetary terms as well as percentages and to ensure residents are informed of the value for money of services to be provided.

Three proposals were put forward:-

- (i) At the proposition of Cllr Peck, seconded by Cllr Greenfield, an 8% increase in precept for 2022-23.
- (ii) At the proposition of Cllr Bracken, seconded by Cllr Holborn, a 3% increase in precept for 2022-23.
- (iii) At the proposition of Cllr Wood, seconded by Cllr Barnett, a 15% increase in precept for 2022-23.

A vote was taken, and 3 councillors were in favour of an 8% increase, 3 councillors in favour of a 3% increase and 6 councillors in favour of a 15% increase.

As a consequence of the results of the previous vote, another vote was taken for a 15% increase in precept for 2022-23. There was a majority of 9 to 3 in favour of a 15% increase in precept/budget for 2022-23. Therefore, the Precept/Budget for 2022-23 will be £348,384.

- 5. To take specific action to meet the level of precept agreed in (3) of how we will attain this level within the budget** – It was agreed to alter the Christmas Lights budget in order to achieve the change from 15.4% to 15% increase.
- 6. To review Gerrards Cross Town Council’s current subscriptions / memberships.** At present these are:-

- (i) Bucks and Milton Keynes Association of Local Councils (B&MKALC) – August 2021-£1238.34 p.a.

Cllr Wood reported that the general feeling from experienced councillors at the SBALC meetings were that B&MKALC was no longer a good source of support for town and parish councils. A number of local parish councils have withdrawn their membership. Also, councillors at this meeting agreed that misinformation has been sent out by B&MKALC and on a number of occasions there has been no response to queries raised by councillors. It was agreed to look for other sources for councillor’s advice and training. The Town Clerk reported that councillors can still attend training courses organised by B&MKALC but these would be at non-member rates. It was agreed to withdraw membership from B&MKALC and ask for a proportionate refund of the subscription. Councillors to send a list of misinformed or lack of

information to the Town Clerk by 15<sup>th</sup> November so there is a list of reasons for withdrawing.  
N.B. Can revisit this decision in 6 months if GXTC wants to reconsider the situation.

- (ii) Society of Local Council Clerks – January 2021 - £234 – Agreed to continue.
- (iii) Chiltern Society – June 2021 £30 p.a. – Agreed to continue
- (iv) ICO Data Protection registration - £40 p.a. – Registration is a legal requirement.

**7. To consider seeking EU funding for the rejuvenation of the town centre** – Cllr Wood reported that a meeting is being held tomorrow with local Landlords, Property Service Agents, Economic Development Officers from Bucks Council, WeAreGX and GXTC. The subject of EU funding will be discussed then. It was agreed that GXTC should ask for funding for replacing the poles used for attaching street decorations along Packhorse Road so that improved bunting, flags Christmas decorations can be displayed in the town centre. Cllr Roberts mentioned he had recently attended a meeting with a local author on Bulstrode Park and suggested asking the new owners to support projects in Gerrards Cross. Cllr Roberts to follow this up.

**8. Date of next meeting – TBD**

Chairman .....

Date.....

Meeting closed at 8.16pm