

SOUTH SWINDON PARISH COUNCIL
(CENTRAL SWINDON SOUTH PARISH COUNCIL)

COUNCIL MEETING

Minutes of the Extraordinary meeting held on 28 January 2020 at 6.30pm
in the Council Chamber, Parish Council Offices Gladstone Street

Present	Cllr C Watts	Chair
	Cllr J Howarth	Vice-Chair
	Cllr S Ahmed	
	Cllr J Ali	
	Cllr S Allsopp	
	Cllr V Ayris	
	Cllr M Gladman	
	Cllr P Herring	
	Cllr J Milner-Barry	
	Cllr J Firmin	
	Cllr D Griffiths	
	Cllr A Hamid	
	Cllr E Heavens	
	Cllr N Hopkins	
	Cllr W Horley	
	Cllr S James	
	Cllr L Kasmaty	
	Cllr M J Miah	
	Cllr J Miah	
	Cllr S Pajak	
	Cllr T Philpot	
	Cllr M Strinkovsky	
	Cllr N Watts	
Officers	Rob Core	Clerk
	Jake Mee	Deputy Clerk

Public Five

Public Session The Chair of the Parish Council opened the public session by stating that the Coate (Badbury Park) Residents Group had submitted questions which would be added to the meeting Minutes and the Parish Council's replies would be given in writing A copy of which appears as Appendix A in the Minute Book.

The Chair of the residents group submitted a statement objecting to the parish council's budget and precept for 2020-21 and additional public questions had been submitted to be appended to their statement. The Chair thanked the group for their scrutiny and meeting to go through their concerns

1043 **Apologies**
Cllr A Hamid
Cllr M J Miah

1044 **Declaration of Interest & Applications for Dispensation**
None

1045 Chairs Report

A copy of which appears as Appendix B in the Minute Book.

The Chair gave a verbal report stating that the budget had been the most challenging to date that included taking into consideration the 2016 budget, when the Parish Council had 4 weeks to create a budget from scratch with a resource starved Borough Council supplying a shared Clerk, divided between 4 other emerging Parishes and no other staff.

From humble beginnings the parish council had achieved a significant amount in a short period of time. The Parish had Improved grounds maintenance from day one, increasing grass cutting and securing continuation of services, resources and retaining experienced hardworking staff.

Where playgrounds had been run down, the Parish re-invested and regenerated 10 of the neediest and ensured that all playgrounds were made safe and regularly inspected.

Where allotments had been neglected, the Parish had funded much needed improvements and worked closely with the allotment holders, decreasing the cost of ownership for parishioners.

Where Libraries were going to be closed, the Parish saved the Parks Library and the Old Town Library, refocusing on younger borrowers and increasing footfall.

Where community centres were to be closed or were in need of urgent repairs, the Parish had supported Broadgreen and Eastcott community centres to ensure doors stay open and continued the vital support to the community.

Where community groups needed help the Parish supported numerous local groups with grants.

Where formal parks had been defunded and vital assets neglected, the Parish started a program of investment in the infrastructure of the Parks.

The budget stands as a watershed for the Parish. It marks the final stage of devolving from the Borough Council and taking full control of the services that the Parish are committed to providing.

Whilst the Parish would have preferred a controlled devolution of services with Street Cleaning transferred this year and grounds maintenance transferred in 2021, it would appear that the Borough had been working in the background to dispose of all the services they provide with four months' notice. Whilst we would have preferred to have had discussions in good faith regarding devolving services, instead of finding out third hand when the January cabinet papers were released by the Borough, we did suspect that this would be the case and had been working in the background to ensure we had contingency. It has meant an 11th hour iteration of the budget and I thank the deputy clerk for moving with the ever changing landscape to pull together the budget that has been submitted.

The budget takes into consideration SSPC policies such as:

A commitment to a direct labour organisation, giving greater control of services provided whilst protecting vital terms and conditions of employees.

A freeze of devolving further services or assets from the Borough Council driven by continued austerity.

A commitment to our living wage foundation accreditation.

The precept rise should be put in context. The increase is the first in three years and includes staff transfer contingency that may allow for another freeze in year 5, therefore averaging 2.5% per annum in the first 4 years in line with inflation.

Compared with other large Parishes who have also been equally challenged to take on services from the unitary authorities, the band d equivalent still remains one of the lowest:

Wiltshire and Swindon Super Parishes Comparison:

Parishes: Band D Increase

South Swindon Parish Council: £126.00

Calne Town Council: £216.00
Chippenham Town Council £262.00
Trowbridge Town Council £162.00
Salisbury Town Council £208.00

Swindon Larger established Parishes Comparison:

Highworth Town Council £159.25
Stratton SM Parish Council £168.11
Wroughton Parish Council £150.66

Please be assured that listing these band d equivalents is not a criticism of these Parish Councils. It seeks to highlight that, as one of the larger Parish Councils in the country we do have the advantage of an economy of scale allowing South Swindon Parish Council to minimise the rise in the precept and keep the council tax low whilst improving the service and adding value for money.

To put this increase into context. This first increase in three years equates to 3p per day per household or 1.6p per day per electorate.

It should also be noted that the initial precept and agreement with SBC was based on staffing levels and plant and machinery leasing from SBC. It did not include depot premises or management structure as highlighted by our independent audit therefore in reality our previous budget was projecting a false position that needs to be rectified as we pushed forward with devolving service. This budget corrects that position and includes provision for a depot, new vehicles, plant, machinery, tool, PPE etc.

The increase will allow us to bring the street cleaning team closer to pre-austerity levels. Whereas we have had 8 street cleaning staff on the streets, this budget will allow us to increase this to 12 staff on the ground. As well as increasing cleaning in known challenging areas in the Parish extra resource will also be able to ensure that we increase the rota at the peripheries of the Parish in areas such as Badbury Park, Wichelstowe and Park South.

As well as improving service provision, this budget will allow us to move forward with projects such as:

- Renovation of the Old Town Bowl
- Regeneration of Broadgreen Community Centre
- Regeneration of Eastcott Community Centre
- Continued support of the Parks and Old Town Libraries
- Investment in Town Gardens and Queens Park
- Obtaining Britain in Bloom Gold Award status
- Completion of the Shaftesbury Lake to Kingshill Nature Corridor.
- Delivering youth service
- Supporting local community groups through grants
- Continued investment

The Chair said that budget tabled sets the template for the next three years, will improve service and provide value for money and is pleased to commend the budget to the Council.

The Councillors discussed the budget.

RESOLVED that the budget be approved

The meeting closed at 06:57 pm

Signed.....

Date.....

Chair of the Council