

NOTES OF THE **MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC PLANNING FORUM HELD ON WEDNESDAY 8<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2023 AT NEWTON'S PLACE, WOLBOROUGH STREET, NEWTON ABBOT AT 7.00 P.M.**

**PRESENT:** Councillors A Hall (Chairperson) Presiding  
P Bullivant  
L Cooke  
D Corney-Walker (Mayor)  
C Davieson  
M Joyce  
C Parker  
M Ryan

In attendance: Philip Rowe – Town Clerk  
Samantha Scott – Deputy Town Clerk & RFO  
Linda McGuirk - Principal Administrator

**SP20. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor L Wood, Nigel Canham, Communications Manager and Sally Henley, Town Development Manager.

**SP21. INTERESTS**

None declared.

**SP22. MINUTES**

The notes of the Strategic Planning Forum held on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> September 2023 were received and signed as a correct record.

**SP23. SALARY UPDATE**

The Town Clerk gave an update on negotiations for the 2023/24 national pay award. Members were informed that the Unions had agreed to accept the employers offer of £1,925 up to SCP43, those employees over SCP43 will receive 3.88% for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. This will be paid to as soon as possible. Members noted the pay award.

**SP24. BUDGET AND STRATEGY FOR THE PERIOD 2023/24 AND THE FOLLOWING YEARS**

a) Budget report for the first 6 months of the financial year.

The RFO advised there had been some queries received in advance of the meeting, which had been answered satisfactorily. The RFO introduced the budget report for the first six months of the financial year, circulated prior to the meeting and invited Members to work through the report and raise questions or seek clarification. Members considered the report and reviewed the budget for the year 2023/24:

Page	Cost Centre	Account	Comment
1	4003	Consultancy fees	Overspend due to additional hours worked by the Community Engagement Officer to help cover maternity leave.
2	4123	Shop front improvement grant	Currently underspent but applications are expected.
3	4171	Phone system	Overspend, RFO is investigating a new provider.
4	4151 & 4152	Gas & Electricity	Monitoring the utilities but generally looking ok.
4	4160	Repairs - property	Window refurbishment project, funded by CIL.
5	4220	Election costs	Self-explanatory.
6	4207	Wharf Road	Overspend due to unexpected Business Rates charge.
7	4167	Electricity – Tower	Overspend. It was <b>agreed</b> the RFO will investigate why the electric costs are high at the Clock Tower.
8	4280	CIC	Salaries – cost neutral.
8	4259	Victoria Gardens	Overspend due to gardening contractor and emptying of additional dog waste bin.
12	4393	Newton In Bloom Contractor	Noted an increase pending in 2024/25 due to a change in contractor.
12	1240	Allotment Rentals	Changes in the management of the Allotments pending.
13	4999	Allotments – Miscellaneous Expenses	Overspend due to tree survey and the resulting tree works.
14	4455	Toilet Hire at the Town Quay	Overspend – looking at new provider.

b) To consider the draft populated budget for 2024/25.

The RFO, introduced the budget report, circulated prior to the meeting and displayed on slides, and highlighted the following areas for consideration.

Page	Cost Centre	Account	Comment
1	4140	Insurance	The suggested increase is in line with inflation and revaluation of assets.
1	1076	Precept	The RFO reported that the increase in the amount of precept received is due to the change in the multiplier used to calculate the precept.
2	4000	Salaries	Increased by 5%. The RFO advised that she has considered pending SCP increases, the cost of employment and has included capacity to increase the FMO hours if agreed.
3	4111	Franking machine	Increased to reflect the rising cost of postage.

3	4122	Legal & Professional fees	Increased to reflect retainment of a legal services provider.
3	4131	Sanitary bin servicing	Small increase in line with inflation and to reflect increased usage.
4	4153	Water	Reduced due to drop in consumption.
4	4155	Refuse collection	RFO will look at alternative providers as a comparison.
5	4196	Van rental	Increased to allow flexibility in vehicle options at the end of the current hire period.
5	4200	Members training	Reduced as it is not an election year.
5	4210	Mayoral Allowance	Agreed not to increase.
5	4212	Town Crier Expenses	Discussed the new Town Crier uniform and <b>agreed</b> the cost will be taken from the Events Budget.
6	4208	Wharf Road – service charge	Increased to reflect the new business rates and increase in utilities.
8	4259	Vitoria Gardens	Increased to cover anticipated rise from the gardening contractor.
11	210	Events	The RFO advised that some cost centres may change due to feedback received from the Events Co-ordinator. This would not affect the bottom line.
12	4393	Newton In Bloom Contractor	Increased to reflect the change of contractor following a tender process.
12	220	Allotments	Members noted the change on relationship with the Allotment Association.
14	4460	Defib at the Town Quay	Members were advised a new defib has been installed at the Town Quay
15	1009	Grass Verge Income	The RFO reported that the Council are waiting for confirmation from the County Council.

*Cllr Louise Cooke left the meeting at 19:20*

The Town Clerk invited members to discuss the implications of the proposed budget. Members raised concerns about impending devolution of services from the District Council and the affect it will have on both residents and the Council. The Town Clerk reported that he is taking part in discussions with the District Council and has reiterated the Town Council requires a minimum of 18 months lead time for the Council to consider the development of any service or asset.

## **SP25. STRATEGIC MATTERS**

The Chairperson noted the list of capital and revenue expenditure, as listed on the agenda, and invited Members to raise comments.

*Cllr M Ryan declared an interest in all matters relating to employment of Facilities Maintenance Officers.*

- Facilities Maintenance Provision – expansion of services, equipment and recruitment of the 4<sup>th</sup> Facilities Maintenance Officer.

A presentation displayed slides to support the verbal presentation from the RFO and Principal Administrator on the suggested expansion of the Facilities Maintenance Service, including suggested equipment, vehicles and staffing. Arising from the discussion, it was:

**AGREED** that the Strategic Planning Forum supports the expansion of the Facilities Maintenance Service, as part of the 2024/25 budget, to include:

- a) Recruitment of the 4<sup>th</sup> Facilities Maintenance Officer on a 37-hour contract.
- b) Lease of the Citymaster 1650 on a 5-year rental.
- c) Considers alternative vehicle options at the end of the current rental period.

- Linger Longer project – Members noted the Town Development Manager had previously reported on suitable locations to install additional seating and that this is an ongoing project.
- Floral Displays and Infrastructure – New Contractor has been appointed.
- Refurbishment of the Signal Gantry – Members were reminded that some funds have been generated following a bequeath to the Museum. Investigations are being undertaken to identify the specification required prior to understanding the full cost implications.
- Penn Inn subway (to support the CIC extension of the Tunnels of Love project). The Town Clerk reported that the Community Engagement Officer was applying for grant funding to expand the project.
- Supporting the Community Trust’s Public Art project – Members supported the idea in principle subject to confirmation of costs.
- Town Trail App – Members agreed this was not a high priority.
- Legal Support – In accordance with minute number 23/10(255) that in principle, the Council supports engaging legal support on a retainer basis, pending a report to include the outcome of research to consider suitable options.

Transport support (schools visiting the Museum) – The Town Clerk reported that some Primary Schools were struggling to visit the museum due to the cost of transport and highlighted the valuable experience the children gain during their visits. Arising from the discussion, it was:

**AGREED** that the Strategic Planning Forum supports the request for £2,400 towards transport costs for Newton Abbot schools to visit the Museum. It was agreed the additional funding should be included in the Museum budget heading.

- Cloudy IT Decisions software – The Town Clerk asked members to consider purchasing the ‘Decisions’ software created by Cloudy IT. This would potentially streamline the way meetings are managed and administered. Following a discussion, it was agreed that further investigations including a demonstration for Councillors is required.

- Youth Council – as identified in the Community Plan. The Town Clerk in consultation with the CIC have been looking at bringing back a Youth Council. The project will require funding to facilitate a 12-month trial. Councillor P Bullivant requested that children who are leaving care are included.

**AGREED** that the Strategic Planning Forum supports the request for £3,000 to be allocated to the establishment of a Youth Council.

In addition, the Clerk raised the following matters for consideration:

- Play equipment specifically designed for town centres – following investigation the Town Clerk reported there are suitable options available that could be incorporated into the existing street scene. A report will be brought to a future meeting.
- Grants – the Town Clerk reminded members that during the recent Finance & Audit Committee meeting discussion had taken place about how financial assistance is allocated to community groups including the CAB and Newton Abbot Community Transport. Arising from discussions, it was:

**AGREED** that the grants budget is divided accordingly:  
£10,500 for financial assistance to community groups, including the CAB and community Transport.  
£10,000 is allocated in grants budget.

*Cllr A Hall abstained from voting.*

- Parking problems adjacent to the Library – The Town Clerk reported that it was proving difficult to find a solution to the parking problems near the Library. Councillor P Bullivant advised members that for the County Council to expediate the Traffic Regulation Orders outside the usual regulation process it would cost £3,000. Members were asked to consider funding the process. Arising from the discussion, it was:

**AGREED** that in principle, the Strategic Planning Forum supports allocating £3,000 from existing budget savings towards processing the Traffic Regulation Order, outside of the usual process. Subject to confirmation on the timescale.

## **SP26. ITEMS ARISING AND FUTURE AGENDAS**

- a) Any relevant issues, which Members wish to raise, not already included on the agenda.

None.

- b) To identify items for the next meetings of the Strategic Planning Forum.

Golden Lion Square refurbishment– Councillor C Parker asked members to consider supporting the refurbishment of Golden Lion Square.

**SP27. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting would be held on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2023

The Meeting closed at 21:00hrs.

Chairperson.....Date.....