

CLIMATE, BIODIVERSITY & PLANNING COMMITTEE

Date: Monday 15 December 2020

Title: Financial Report – Revised Budget 2020-21 & Estimates 2021-22

Contact Officer: Town Clerk/RFO – Sharon Groth

Background

Members will be aware from other Committee reports that the Council needs to consider its budget annually by reviewing the current years expenditure and income as well as estimating next years, to raise the Precept.

The Cost Centre and budget for this Committee is slightly different in comparison to the operational side of the Council's business as it relates to:

1. Officer time administering the planning side of the Committee – which is via a recharge from Central Support;
2. Projects/initiatives to support the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in June 2019 and meet its objective of being carbon neutral by 2028. This objective crosses over all the Council's services and facilities and should be at the forefront of the Council's decision making.

Current Situation

During last year's budget setting an arbitrary budget of £10,000 was set aside towards Climate emergency projects [a/c 4205/402]. In addition, there was £10,000 in an earmarked reserve for the Lake & Country Park management plan works – yet to be established.

Other projects included setting aside funds for the eventual replacement of the Council's fleet of work vans for electric with £5,000 put in 2020/21 [4971/800]; also, the replacement of the Burwell Hall boiler - £15,000 [4903/800].

The Compliance & Environment Officer has provided these additional comments on this year and next year's budget for consideration by the Committee:

Burwell boiler: If the £10,000 allocated for the patio project can be reallocated to the £15,000 for the boiler that would be great. I think an additional £5000 to bring the total up to £30,000 would ensure that we could further future proof the building's heating system. To run a solar battery storage system to reduce the higher cost of electricity over gas. I will contact Tim

Nicholls from Renewable Energy Co-operative to see if they can provide an additional quote in time for the budget.

Recycling bins: £300 is sufficient to transfer us over to recycling (internal waste from town hall and Corn Exchange).

Lake and Country Park: The £10,000 allocation is probably more than sufficient. The ecology study is £620 and any findings from that that require action can be immediately remedied to protect wildlife and fauna. Additional studies may be required from that funding to feed into a management statement but for now expanding on the old ranger management plan with the updated ecology study is a great starting point. That plan outlined the southern section of the lake as a nature reserve so any future works should support that plan.

The leys Depot: For phase 1 of this plan, I was going to reduce the energy consumption of the area. For these works I estimate we would require £1500. This is to update the one heater in the break room, fit a dehumidifier and install sensored lights. I will chase Tim on a quote for the installation of the solar system for phase 2 in this area to help feed into the 2022-2023 budget as we talked about this would roll on from the 2021-22 budget.

Thermal imaging camera rental scheme: To add to helping the town of Witney reducing energy and taking something away from the environment meeting we both attended. I would like to suggest the Council purchase a thermal imaging camera for residents of Witney to rent to help make better informed improvement to their homes. The camera would cost around £600 (depending on model) and this could then be a service we provide free of charge or rent out the camera at a cost to protect against damages. The councillors liked the idea of the reducing waste roadshow but were unsure on budget allocation. So maybe the allocation of £1,000 can be split across both projects as both support the residents of Witney.

Environmental impact

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 – with this in mind Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make regarding its facilities and services it operates.

Above provides some options for the Council to reduce its own impact as well as facilitating the community. This is ongoing project.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should consider any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

Procuring and loaning equipment would need a robust hire agreement and damage deposit scheme in place, so additional thought needs to go into how the Council could protect its asset if it were to progress this option. The Committee also needs to be mindful that it is custodians of taxpayer's money and therefore it needs to be sure that some of these projects

are sustainable and do in fact go towards meeting the Council's objective of carbon neutrality by 2028.

Financial implications

These are contained in the report above – and Members should consider and prioritise these projects to put forward to the budget setting meeting in January if they are to be covered within the 2021/22 precept.

Members should be mindful though of trying to make savings in the current and subsequent years due to the loss of income and additional expenditure because of COVID-19.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following the projects and initiatives as detailed above and decide if any are to be progressed in future years; particularly

1. To increase the budget for the Burwell Hall heating from £15,000 already set aside to £30,000 but using the £10,000 originally set aside for the patio and agreeing an additional £5,000;
2. To continue to set aside £5,000 year on year towards upgrading the Council's fleet of works vehicles to electric;
3. To continue to budget £10,000 towards Climate emergency;
4. To continue to budget £10,000 towards the Lake & Country Park/Biodiversity.