

HALLS CEMETERIES AND ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE

Date: Monday 17th January 2022
Title: **Finance & Budget Report**
Contact Officer: Town Clerk/RFO – Sharon Groth

BACKGROUND

Following the decision at the EOC on 5th January 2022 the purpose of this report is to provide the necessary information for Members to review the Committee’s revenue and capital expenditure [and income if appropriate] in order to identify areas for savings, as well as realistically prioritising projects to support the Council’s emerging medium term financial strategy.

CURRENT SITUATION

The Town Clerk has extracted information from her final budget report submitted to the EOC relevant to this Committee for ease of reference.

RECHARGE FROM THE WORKS DEPARTMENT [COST CENTRE 601] & CENTRAL SUPPORT [COST CENTRE 602]

It should be noted that the revised estimates and the estimates for next year do not include the recharges from these two cost centres; these will be calculated after the budget has been adopted.

RECHARGE FROM AGENCY SERVICES – GROUNDS CONTRACT [COST CENTRE 503]

Similarly with regard to the Grounds Maintenance Contract – [shown as 4891- Agency Services Recharge] – Members will be aware that the present contract has been extended to end on 30 September 2022 and a new specification is currently being drawn up to take account of the outcomes from the Open Spaces Strategy - so for the purposes of this report the current years actual known figures have been retained with a 5% inflationary increase applied, in order to be able to make comparison on a like for like basis across the two years. It is hoped that the Council will be able to make a decision on the future of its Grounds Maintenance Service early in the new year when the Consultant has finalised his report.

COMMITTEE: HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS

The Committees Draft Revised Budget for 2021/22 and Estimates for 2022/23 are attached at **Appendix A** along with budget notes at **Appendix B**.

102 – LANGDALE HALL

This cost centre relates to the property currently leased to the ICE Centre. This includes costs incurred under landlords responsibilities as well as recharges made to the tenant.

103 – BARS

This cost centre relates to the direct costs for the café/bar 1863 in the Corn Exchange, as well as the bar within the Burwell Hall, as well as the income derived from this operation.

Income and expenditure is based on the aspirations set out in the business plan written by the Venue & Events Officer and recently agreed by the Corn Exchange Working Party – whereby an extension to the operating days and hours for the Café were agreed as well as additional staffing and setting up to sell hot lunches. Hopefully the figures the budget is based on are realistic and achievable.

104 – CORN EXCHANGE.

This includes all income from hall hire, as well as the expenditure relating to the management of the building.

With the introduction of theatrical sound, lighting and seating it is hoped that it will attract more touring theatre acts and the Venue & Events Officer will be able to draw up an all-encompassing programme of events to help with income generation as well as offsetting some of the expenditure. The events budget 4141/104 has therefore been increased to £8,000 in next years budget as agreed by the Corn Exchange Working Party, as well as providing for additional caretaking staff (4001/104 + on-costs).

The Council's halls income was significantly hit in 2020-21 due to COVID which resulted in a loss of £37,000 against that budget; it continues to impact the current year although hopefully on target to reach the revised budgeted income but this is a 50% drop in previous years income.

105 – BURWELL HALL

This includes all income from hall hire, as well as the expenditure relating to the management of the Burwell Hall.

Similar to the Corn Exchange, income has been significantly hit due to COVID – although the hall is in line to achieve the income originally budgeted for in the current financial year.

Part of the increase in Caretaking hours has been apportioned over to cover the Burwell Hall as explained above.

Within last years budget £33,000 was set aside for the replacement of the (1) heating system (£30,000) and (2) curtains (£3,000). The status of heating replacement project is that an external report is awaited on the most efficient heating system – hopefully the Project Officer will be reporting the findings back to the committee early in the new year. **In the meantime**

these funds are held in an Earmarked Reserve (EMR) (A/c 372) until such time as they are needed to cover the expenditure.

106 – MADLEY PARK COMMUNITY CENTRE

This cost centre relates to the property currently leased to the Madley Park Trust. This includes costs incurred under landlords responsibilities as well as recharges made to the tenant.

An Earmarked Reserve (EMR) is held (A/c 329) which currently stands at £20,980 as a contingency should anything structural go wrong with the building.

301 – TOWER HILL CEMETERY

This cemetery is now primarily closed to new reservations for burials as it is potentially full, although there is still some space for the burial of ashes – and pre-existing reservations. However, there are substantial running costs of maintaining the Cemetery despite it being closed.

Within the Cemetery there is the Cemetery Lodge which is leased by the Co-operative Funeral Company with rental income shown at budget line 1050/301. However there are also two Chapels – one is operational and occasionally used by the public for the funeral services. The other Chapel was part of the lease to the Co-operative but was handed back a few years ago when the terms of the lease was renewed.

As part of the Council's Open Spaces Strategy within the Action Plan – IS3 requires the Council to undertake a full options survey of the unused buildings at the cemeteries – scheduled to take place in April 2022 with an anticipated completion of the survey stage being November 2022. Therefore a Revenue Growth Item for professional fees has been provided at budget line 4059/301 of £5,000 – **however this is to be funded from the EMR held (A/c 362) which currently stands at £18,000.**

An EMR for Memorial Maintenance is also held (A/c 318) this has accumulated over time whereby the Council transfers unspent budget line 4355 Memorial Maintenance into this reserve because to commissioning of the topple testing is costly but an essential requirement at set intervals. It is therefore proposed that any expenditure is funded from the EMR – there is a corresponding entry in the budget at 4495 – TFR From Earmarked Reserve in the revised budget for 2021-22 and the estimates for 2022-23.

302 – WINDRUSH CEMETERY

Income from burials and the cost of maintaining the site.

Income continues to be pretty stable, with no surprises. With the development of the land adjoining the Cemetery and the dialogue with the developers to provide an alternative access road off the development there maybe some significant expenditure required in the next few years to provide for the road infrastructure. The Officers continue to work on the mapping

of the burial ground in order to digitise the records as well as lay out the remaining burial plots. **An EMR is held (A/c 327) which currently stands at £93,853, with a further £25,000 budgeted to be set aside in the 22-23 budget.**

303 – CLOSED CHURCHYARDS ST MARY’S & HOLY TRINITY

The Council is responsible for some aspects of maintenance in these closed churchyards and therefore the costs associated to this work.

It was established several years ago that part of the Council’s responsibility was for part of the boundary wall and due to some deterioration, a condition survey was commissioned to establish what works were required under health and safety to safeguard the Council from any claims, particularly as there is a high footfall through the churchyard. The Council has therefore established a considerable budget of £25,150 shown at budget line 4036/303 which has rolled over from the two previous financial years.

As mentioned above the Council has a significant EMR for Memorial Maintenance which currently stands at £30,301 (A/c 318) it is therefore proposed that £10,000 of this is used to offset the budget provision in next years estimates for these works to St Mary’s wall – currently the Operations & Estates Advisor is obtaining quotes for this work. The corresponding budget line is provided at 4495/303 in the 2022/23 estimates.

305 – ALLOTMENTS

Three allotment sites are under the management of the Witney Allotments Association. With the fourth – the new Windrush Allotments about to be incorporated and management transferred in the new lease.

EARMARKED RESERVES (EMR)

The Town Clerk has referred to the use of some EMR’s in the report above to suggest how expenditure can be funded, as well as some Capital and Special Revenue Projects later in this report to make the budget affordable and limit future increases in the precept/Band D Council Tax – as well as setting clear priorities to inform an emerging medium term financial strategy.

A full list of the EMRs is provided in the attached appendices for Member’s information (**Appendix C**).

S106/DEFERRED GRANTS

The funds which are held as deferred grants unapplied from S106 receipts that have been paid over are as follows:

Deferred Unapplied Grants	(From)	31.03.22
		£
Sale of Land Allotments	WODC	191996
S106 Corn Exchange	WODC	128573

S106 West Witney Sports	WODC	310325
S106 Burwell Sports	Abbeymills Homes	25000
S106 C/Ex	Abbeymills Homes	12250
S106 Skate Park	Abbeymills Homes	12250
Bus Shelters etc	Abbeymills Homes	3295
		683688

It should be noted that further S106 funds are pledged but not yet received.

CAPITAL & SPECIAL REVENUE PROJECTS

As explained at the presentation on 13 December 2021 via Zoom – the first draft budget was based on all the projects identified during committee meetings in the course of the year as well as those identified via the Open Spaces Strategy. Pulling it altogether for the budget it became obvious that the list wasn't realistic/physically achievable or affordable (unless the Council wished to put up the precept by 25%).

On the 20 December 2021 the Town Clerk met with the Chairs of Committees to go through the projects to try and refine the budget and get guidance on possible % increases to the precept. The Town Clerk has done her best to interpret these instructions. To enable workload to be planned properly during the coming financial year the resultant project list is provided at **Appendix D** along with **Appendix E** which details projects in progress in the current year.

The Town Clerk would urge the Committee to scrutinise its project list and prioritise them accordingly – this may mean some are deferred to future years – but this will help inform the emerging medium term financial strategy.

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 with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

RISK

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

Proper and sound financial management is necessary as all Councillors are collectively responsible for the budget, particularly expenditure and ensuring it is expended lawfully and in line with the Council's Financial Regulations.

As Town Clerk, the Council's Proper Officer and Responsible Financial Officer it is her job to advise accordingly, in line with Financial Regulations and Statute. She has carried out

extensive scrutiny of the Council's income and expenditure but in line with the resolution at the EOC the figures are presented for scrutiny by the Committee in order to identify savings.

Members should note that given the uncertainty around the pandemic it would not be prudent to increase income because of the limited customer base and demand for things such as football pitches. Unless Members want to increase its fees and charges beyond the already agreed inflationary increases then the Town Clerk would advise no change to budgeted income.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

This report forms part of the Council's due diligence and a process in line with its Financial Regulations. The financial implications are detailed above and also in the attached appendices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are invited to note the report and consider how it can reduce its revenue expenditure as well as prioritising projects to inform a medium-term financial strategy for the Council.