

STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Date: Monday 24th 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: STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

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**.

402 – COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

This cost centre relates to the infrastructure found in the town like bus shelters, bins, benches, cycle racks, defibrillators, church clock, floral displays – and the maintenance of them.

An infrastructure EMR has been set up (A/c 369) and the balance currently stands at £17,630 – however within this there is funding for the replacement of the Welch Way Planters whereby £2,000 is being set aside for 5 years so that a concrete planter can be created which will be more permanent than the wooden one currently in place. Other assets within this EMR include bins, benches, slat bins, bus shelters, defibs – and this is where budgets haven't yet been spent.

4067 – Tree Survey objective PO3 from the Open Spaces Strategy requires the Council to draw up and adopt a comprehensive arboriculture plan an additional £3,000 has been provided in this budget line for a professional report to be drafted in the next financial year.

4166 – Defibrillator Expenditure the only recreation ground that is in the Council's ownership that doesn't have a defibrillator is King Georges Field –whilst there is FA grant funding for sports teams to apply for part funding Officers are looking into the feasibility of this and whether the Council should set aside the funding itself. An additional £1500 has been set aside in the 22-23 budget for this.

4208 – COVID-19 Memorial it has been agreed that some sort of lasting memorial should be constructed in the town for the survivors and those that lost their life to COVID. At this stage it hasn't been established what the memorial should look like, and a Working Party has been established to look into this. For the time being a nominal budget of £1500 has been set aside in the 2022-23 budget.

4215 – In Bloom Entry within the Open Spaces Strategy PO5 in the action plan required the Council to consider its future entry into the In Bloom competition. This has now been considered and whilst the Council have no desire to enter the full competition, it was decided to continue entering individual assets where possible – such as the Leys Recreation Ground and maybe the Cemeteries. This also includes running the schools in bloom competition. The budget for 2022-23 has been left as £6,000.

4990 – Contribution to CCTV Scheme since the Town Centre CCTV Scheme was established back in 2003 the Town Council has contributed £10,000 towards the scheme. For the time being it has been assumed that the level of contribution remains the same although Members should be aware from previous officer reports that the scheme has been under review by WODC and TVP for a number of years now and some of the equipment is in desperate need to be replaced. **The Council does also hold an EMR of £10,000(A/c 375) which was set aside to provide mobile cameras on the Leys and Burwell Recreation Grounds – in response to some serious anti-social behaviour a few years ago. WODC did install a camera on the Leys because they also had issues with the public toilets which they are responsible for.**

408 – COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

This relates to community events like the advent fayre, remembrance Sunday parade, anniversaries, as well as supporting the Youth Council.

4103 – Grant Youth Council activity of the Youth Council has waned due to COVID. Whilst the budget has been removed from the revised budget, it has been reinstated in 2022-23 in the hope that it will be resurrected.

4109 – Blue Plaques it was agreed to allocate £300 towards the plaque for Batts House, therefore the budget has been retained in the current year – although it is anticipated the installation will in fact be in 2022-23.

4141 – Events this budget line covers a number of community events the Council funds. However due to COVID a number were unable to take place in 2021, the revised budget has been reduced accordingly, and reinstated for 2022-23.

4145 – Queens Jubilee (2022) a Working Party has been established, and whilst a higher budget was desirable, realistically a budget of £3,000 has been set aside in consultation with the Chair of the Working Party and others.

Within the Policy Governance & Finance Committee, the Stronger Communities also has responsibility for various grants and events, as follows:

407 – GRANTS & DONATIONS – EXPENDITURE UNDER GPC/S137

This includes the various grants the Council awards annually and adhoc.

4105 – Xmas Lights Tree & Infrastructure following the successful tender of the lights contract for the next three years from 2021, the revised and budget estimate for 2022-23 has been adjusted based on known figures.

4111 – Water Safety/Education earlier in the year the Committee agreed to set aside a budget to help support a water safety campaign/education programme with other stakeholders. The Town Clerk along with key Councillors continue to progress this project and are hopeful a campaign will be available to roll out in the local schools as well as on social media and other platforms in time for Spring and the better weather. The budget set aside in 2022-23 is £10,000. Once the project is scoped and costings known a report will be brought back to Committee for agreement.

4167 – Bus Service the Council continues to support the West Oxfordshire Community Transport, this is the 2nd year of 3 at £21,000 per annum funding is pledged for.

4169 – Children & Youth Provision both the Stronger Communities and Policy, Governance & Finance Committees have agreed that the budget line for grants to those organisations that provide services for children and youth in the Town should be increased from £30,000 to £40,000 in the 2022-23 financial year. The current years budget was supplemented by the unspent funds from the Grants General budget line which was to support the Witney Music Festival and the Witney Carnival events which didn't go ahead this summer due to COVID.

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 Grants Unapplied	(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.