

CLIMATE, BIODIVERSITY & PLANNING COMMITTEE

Date: Tuesday, 25 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 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. **Appendix A refers.**

[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.

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[206 – Witney Country Park](#)

This cost centre relates to the maintenance of the lake and country park.

The two main/substantial budget lines for this cost centre are explained as follows:

4001 – Salaries, 4002 – ER’S NIC, 4003 – ER’S Superann the Staffing Review and the Open Spaces Strategy identified the need for a Park Ranger to manage the lake and country park as well as supporting the Council achieve its biodiversity aspirations. To date the Town Clerk has not managed to recruit this role – so for the purposes of the revised budget these budget lines have been reduced in the hope that the position will be filled before the year end.

4042 – Equipment/Maintenance part of this budget line relates to the continual maintenance of the paths around the lake which almost annually require attention due to flooding and paths being naturally eroded. The other more substantial part of the budget is for bank erosion works as well managing/increasing the biodiversity of the lake and country park. In light of the tragic incident last summer this budget line has been retained for additional H&S/remedial works suggested as part of the Council’s independent risk assessment, and as well as meeting OCC LP4. It also ensures funding is available for replacement life buoys which often are damaged or vandalised.

OPEN SPACES STRATEGY

Members are reminded of the relevant actions in the Council’s adopted Open Spaces Strategy which are the responsibility of this Committee:

Ref	Action	Who Involved?	Start
PO 3	Draw up and adopt a comprehensive arboriculture plan	WTC Staff, Tree Officer	Sep-21
PO 4	Identify and implement possible re-wilding areas	WTC Staff	Dec-21
LP 5	Prepare an improvement and upgrade plan for angling facilities at the Country Park and Lake	WTC Staff, Angling Club	Jan-22
LP 4	Prepare and adopt a comprehensive management and improvement plan for the Country Park and Lake area	WTC Staff, Tree Officer, Natural England, Specialist Advisors	Apr-22
IS 8	Seek to work with partners to achieve a structured, integrated and fully connected footpath and cycle path network around the town.	WTC Staff, Partners	Apr-22

OTHER BUDGET LINES UNDER INDIRECT CONTROL

4205/402 – Climate Emergency Fund is as follows:

B/fwd 20/21	21/22	Proposed 22/23	Expenditure to date
£10,000	£15,000	£15,000	£0

By the start of the next financial year there will be a total fund of £40,000 (assuming the unspent budget from current year is rolled over).

4066/402 – Replacement Trees is as follows:

B/fwd 20/21	21/22	Proposed 22/23	Expenditure to date
£4,000	£4,000	£4,000	£2,556

It is Council policy that any trees which have to be removed are replaced and therefore the necessary funding needs to be in place to fulfil its objective.

4067/402 – Tree Survey is as follows:

B/fwd 20/21	21/22	Proposed 22/23	Expenditure to date
£1,250	£5,000	£8,000*	£1,926

The Council has a rolling programme of surveying its tree stock – which is a requirement for insurance purposes. Within the budget proposed for 22/23 there is also provision for OSS-PO3.

EARMARKED RESERVES (EMR)

For information a scheduled of the EMRs is provided at **Appendix B**. the only EMR relevant to this committee is one set aside for Electric Vehicles (370) which currently stands at £14,200.

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.

Items in the Capital/Special Revenue Budget relevant to this Committee include:

Project	£	Notes
Arboriculture Plan	£3,000	OSS PO3 - As mentioned previously (this was in fact reduced down from £10,000)
Lake works – Anglers	£5,000	OSS LP5
Electric Vehicles	£15,000	See appendix C
Energy Efficiency – Buildings	£20,000	Reduced down from £300k

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.

Within the budget there is financial provision for various projects to assist the Council in achieving its objectives. These extend to upgrading of some of its vehicles, making buildings more energy efficient, as well as using green utility companies.

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 and is confident in the accuracy of her figures presented.

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.