

COWES TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Finance, Acquisitions & Staffing Committee Meeting held in The Library, Northwood House, Cowes on Tuesday 23 November 2021 at 6.15pm.

Present: Councillors Walters (Chair), Bertie, Brown, Ellis, Hollis, Jones & Nicholson.

In attendance: Councillor Wardrop (6.20pm – 7.16pm) (non-voting);
Debbie Faulkner, Town Clerk (via Zoom); Kate Gibbs, Assistant Town Clerk;
a representative from St Mary the Virgin Church, Cowes;
a representative from Northwood House Charitable Trust Co. Ltd.

610 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Rafferty.

611 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Walters declared a pecuniary interest in Minute No. 620.1 as he has a standing order and makes donations to St Mary the Virgin Church, Cowes.

612 MINUTES RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Finance, Acquisitions & Staffing Committee meeting held on 28 September 2021 be taken as read, approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

613 FINANCIAL STATEMENT AS AT 30 SEPTEMBER 2021

The Town Clerk submitted a financial statement for the quarter ending 30 September 2021 giving details of income and expenditure. Councillors looked at the spend against the budget headings and the ring fenced and ear marked balances. The balances in the Town Council's bank accounts and petty cash as at 30 September 2021 were £725,257.17 of which £214,509.98 is ring fenced / ear marked expenditure. The Reserves as at 30 September 2021 were £288,025.27 which represent approximately 11 months operating costs which falls within the recommended 3 to 12 months reserves as set by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) .

Councillors noted that the balance of any funds being held for The Cut project could soon be released for other capital projects, along with funds held for the public toilet refurbishment programme. These will be matters for the Projects Committee to discuss. The funds held for 'The Big Lunch 2021' of £3,576.05 have not been spent. Councillors will have to decide whether to contribute towards the event being planned next year to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. If not, then the balance of the funds from the 2019 event of £1,576.05 will have to be refunded to the organising Committee. It was:

RECOMMENDED

That Cowes Town Council receive, note and approve the Financial Statement as at 30 September 2021.

614 TOILET CLEANING AND LITTER PICKING CONTRACT AS FROM 1 APRIL 2022

The Town Clerk reported that three contractors had quoted for the Toilet Cleaning & Litter Picking Contract as from 1 April 2022. All three quotations were considered and it was:

RECOMMENDED

- 1. That Cowes Town Council enters into a Toilet Cleaning & Litter Picking Contract for 2022 / 2023 with Contractor C for the sum of £34,740.63.**
- 2. That Contractor C completes Cowes Town Council's Supplier Evaluation Form, subject to the Town Council's approval of the Form, prior to the start of the contract beginning on 1 April 2022.**

615 GROUNDS MAINTENANCE CONTRACT AT NORTHWOOD PARK AS FROM 1 APRIL 2022

The Town Clerk reported that four contractors had been asked to quote for the grounds maintenance contract at Northwood Park as from 1 April 2022. One contractor provided a quotation, one contractor declined to quote, two contractors did not respond despite several reminders. As Cowes Town Council's Financial Regulation 10.4 states that three quotations must be obtained for works exceeding £1,500 but below £50,000, the Town Clerk proposed the suspension of Financial Regulation 10.4 as other quotations are not forthcoming.

Councillors discussed how best this contract could be managed in future years. It was proposed that Northwood House Charitable Trust Co. Ltd engage the Grounds Maintenance Contractor themselves and make a grant application to Cowes Town Council for a contribution to the contract.

It was:

RECOMMENDED

- 1. That Cowes Town Council suspends Financial Regulation 10.4 and enters into a Grounds Maintenance Contract for 2022 / 2023 with Contractor A for the sum of £12,265.00.**
- 2. That Contractor A completes Cowes Town Council's Supplier Evaluation Form, subject to the Town Council's approval of the Form, prior to the start of the contract beginning on 1 April 2022.**
- 3. That, as from 1 April 2023, Northwood House Charitable Trust Co. Ltd directly engage the Grounds Maintenance Contractor for works at Northwood Park and make a grant application to Cowes Town Council for a contribution to the contract.**

616 FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR COWES LIBRARY

Councillors discussed the substantial financial support that has been given to Cowes Library for the last five financial years. The Town Council pays towards the cleaning costs, gas and electricity, water and sewerage, building security, premises insurance and a salary cost. Without the support of Cowes Town Council the Library could be faced with closure. By financially supporting the Library, Councillors discussed what the Town Council's responsibilities are in terms of risks and liabilities for Cowes Town Council in relation to staffing matters and public liability insurance. Councillors also discussed that the Library benefits the residents of Gurnard and Northwood along with Cowes residents. It was agreed:

ACTIONS

- 1. The Town Clerk will write to the IW Council to ascertain any risks and liabilities to Cowes Town Council by providing financial support to Cowes Library.**
- 2. The Town Clerk will write to Gurnard and Northwood Parish Councils asking if they will also make a contribution, through their precept, towards the costs of supporting Cowes Library.**
- 3. Following responses to the above, this matter will be added to the next Agenda of the Finance, Acquisitions and Staffing Committee for further discussion and consideration.**

617 FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR THE 'WARMER COWES' PROJECT

Councillors discussed the financial support for the 'Warmer Cowes' project. £1,500 per year is budgeted for home visits to investigate energy savings for Cowes residents. £1,200 is budgeted for anti-freeze payments which can assist with an energy saving purchase for those Cowes residents on low incomes. Councillors discussed that it is for The Footprint Trust to identify those Cowes residents who need assistance and remove the need for Cowes Town Council to authorise any anti-freeze payments as from 1 April 2022. It was:

RECOMMENDED

- 1. That Cowes Town Council identifies an amount of £2,700 in the Budget for 2022 / 2023 for the 'Warmer Cowes' project.**
- 2. That The Footprint Trust have to make a grant application to Cowes Town Council for the sum of £2,700.**

618 DRAFT BUDGET FOR 2022 / 2023

The Town Clerk presented Councillors with a draft budget for 2022 / 2023 which is split into three sections; each section was reviewed line by line.

1. General Administration – An increase in the scale points of the Clerks' salaries, possible national pay rise and increased National Insurance costs, results in an increase of £3,000. Sundry Office Expenses has been merged into the Stationery & Office Expenses / Software budget heading. Hire of meeting rooms and / or Zoom has been increased by £200 to allow for bigger rooms to be used for meetings during the ongoing pandemic. Insurance and Audit and Accountancy have increased by £200 and £100 respectively to cover any rise in costs.

The overall increase in this section being £3,500.

2. Discretionary Services – There has been a small increase to the Grounds Maintenance works at Northwood Recreation Ground and other green areas in Cowes. The Toilet Cleaning and Litter Picking contract has seen an overall reduction in costs and as Business Rates are no longer applicable that has also allowed for savings in this area. The cost of the Environment Officer Services has increased slightly. The insertion of a budget heading 'Cowes & Northwood Place Plan Promotion' has been included for the sum of £12,000.

The overall increase in this section being £4,954.

3. Town Improvements / Grants/ Special Events – An increase of £500 has been made to the Street Furniture Maintenance budget to allow assets in the Town to be upgraded. A reduction of £2,000 has been made to the 'High Street Decoration / Festive Lights / Bunting' budget heading. A reduction of £5,000 has been made to the 'Grants' budget heading. An increase of £3,500 has been made to the 'Public Toilet Refurbishment & Capital Projects' budget heading.

The overall decrease in this section being £3,000.

Overall within the three sections there is a proposed increase to the budget of £5,454 and the precept for 2022 / 2023 will be £319,794. The increase to a Band D property as result of this rise in the precept will be approximately £1.29. It was:

RECOMMENDED

That Cowes Town Council approves the Draft Budget for 2022 / 2023, as below, which will require the precept, including grant, to be £319,794.

COWES TOWN COUNCIL DRAFT BUDGET 2022-2023

EXPENDITURE	2022-2023
GENERAL ADMINISTRATION	
Town Clerks' salaries / NIC/ Tax / Pension	£56,440
Office Rent	£8,700
Stationery / Sundry Office Expenses/Software	£700
Office Equipment / Photocopier	£1,000
Telephone / Broadband / Website	£1,500
Postage	£300
Conference fees & Travelling	£500
Training	£500
Hire of Meeting Rooms and / or Zoom	£400
Subscriptions	£2,100
Insurance	£2,500
Audit and Accountancy	£2,100
Mayor's Allowance	£2,000
Newsletter / Publicity	£4,000
Elections / Admin Contingency	£2,500
Civic Regalia	£500
Sub Total	£85,740
DISCRETIONARY SERVICES	
Northwood Rec Grounds Maintenance	£7,814
Northwood Rec - Skate Park / MUGA / Outdoor Gym Maintenance	£6,000
Northwood Rec Toilets - Cleaning, electricity + other costs	£10,000
Northwood Park Grounds Maintenance	£12,265
Northwood Park Toilets - Cleaning Only	£4,000
Dog + Litter bin emptying	£5,600
Other grounds maintenance in Cowes	£6,950
4 Public Toilets - Cleaning + other costs	£42,000
Cowes Library	£22,400
Cowes In Bloom	£8,000
Environment Officer	£2,825
Warmer Cowes	£2,700
Park Road Crossing Patrol	£5,000
Cowes & Northwood Place Plan Promotion	£12,000
Discretionary Services Contingency	£8,000
Sub Total	£155,554
TOWN IMPROVEMENTS / GRANTS / SPECIAL EVENTS	
Street furniture maintenance	£3,000
High Street Decoration / Festive lights / Bunting	£15,000
New Projects	£4,000
Grants	£15,000
Remembrance Sunday & Charity Donations	£1,500
Public Toilet refurbishment & Capital Projects	£40,000
Sub Total	£78,500
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	£319,794

619 OPTION FOR MATURED FUNDS HELD IN THE TOWN COUNCIL'S NATIONWIDE BUSINESS 1 YEAR FIXED RATE SAVER ACCOUNT

The Town Clerk advised Councillors that Cowes Town Council's Nationwide Business 1 Year Fixed Rate Saver Account matured on 22 November 2021 with a balance of £121,928.86 plus interest. Several options, post maturity, have been offered by Nationwide which include re-investing the funds into another Business 1 Year Fixed Rate Saver Account, a Business Instant Saver Account or Business 35 Day Saver Account. It was:

RECOMMENDED

That Cowes Town Council transfers the funds held into another Nationwide Business 1 Year Fixed Rate Saver Account with a gross interest rate per annum of 0.30%.

Councillor Walters left the meeting while the St Mary the Virgin Church, Cowes, Grant Application was discussed; Councillor Ellis took the Chair.

620 APPLICATIONS FOR GRANT

The Town Clerk advised that £16,375 remained in the budget heading for 'Grants'. However, the grant awarded to Full Turn Circus of £775 has been returned as the event will not be proceeding at this time. Therefore £17,150 remains in the budget heading for 'Grants'.

The Town Council have been asked to consider the following Applications for Grant:

1. St Mary the Virgin Church, Cowes – Dismantle 7 trees / bushes to ground level, reduce height of holly bush and remove overhang Holm Oak - £2,880
2. Cowes Cricket Club – Masport Olympic 660 Cylinder Mower - £1,489.95
3. Isle of Wight Music, Dance & Drama Festival – 2021 Festival - £50

After a full discussion about each Grant Application it was:

RECOMMENDED

1. **That a grant be made to St Mary the Virgin Church, Cowes in the sum of £2,880.**
2. **That Cowes Town Council does not make a grant to Cowes Cricket Club.**
3. **That a grant be made to the Isle of Wight Music, Dance & Drama Festival in the sum of £50.**

621 REVIEW OF COWES TOWN COUNCIL'S GRANT APPLICATION FORM (MINUTE NO. 601 REFERS)

At the Finance, Acquisitions & Staffing Committee on 28 September 2021, the Committee agreed to review the current Grant Application Form and bring any suggestions for additions or removals to the form back to the next Committee meeting. It was:

RECOMMENDED

That no additions or removals are required to Cowes Town Council's Grant Application Form.

622 STAFFING MATTERS

The Chairman advised Councillors that any discussions regarding the possible engagement of a Town Manager must be done in consultation with the Clerks. Any concerns regarding the direction that the Town Council is moving can be raised at the Finance, Acquisitions & Staffing Committee.

623 HEALTH AND SAFETY MATTERS

To continue to protect Councillors and the Clerks from the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, it was agreed that the Town Council should continue to use bigger rooms than the Town Council's office for Town Council, Committee and any other meetings.

624 ITEMS FOR INCLUSION ON FUTURE AGENDAS

There were no items raised for inclusion on future agendas.

The proceedings terminated at 8.05pm.

CHAIRMAN