

## COWES TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Finance, Acquisitions & Staffing Committee Meeting held in the Town Council Office, Northwood House, Cowes on Tuesday 26 November 2024 at 6.15pm.

**Present:** Councillors Carter (Chair), Ellis, Nicholson, Oliver & Walters.

**In attendance:** Debbie Faulkner, Locum Town Clerk; Kate Scragg, Deputy Town Clerk.

### 921 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Brown, Hollis & Rafferty.

### 922 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Carter, Ellis, Oliver & Walters declared a non-pecuniary interest in regard to Minute No 924 as residents of Cowes and subject to the Town Council precept.

### 923 MINUTES RESOLVED

**That the Minutes of the Finance, Acquisitions & Staffing Committee meeting held on 22 October 2024 be taken as read, approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.**

### 924 DRAFT BUDGET FOR 2025 / 2026

Having consulted with the Chairman of the Finance, Acquisitions & Staffing Committee, the Town Clerk presented Councillors with the draft Budget (v1) for 2025 / 2026. The budget is split into three sections; each section was reviewed line by line.

**1. General Administration** – An increase in the Clerks' salaries due to an increase in staff numbers has resulted in an increase of £70,000. Office Equipment has increased by £8,000 to £9,000 to enable the purchase of 3 new computers; Telephone / Broadband / Website has increased by £100 to allow for increasing costs; Training has increased by £500 to enable training for new staff; Hire of meeting rooms has increased by £400 as to accommodate new staff the Town Council Office, the office will not be suitable to hold Committee meetings; Subscriptions have increased by £300 to accommodate new staff; Insurance has increased by £700 to cover increased costs; Audit and Accountancy has increased by £300 to cover expected inflation; Elections / Admin contingency has increased by £13,500 in case all 4 Cowes' wards are contested at the 2025 local election. **The overall increase in this section being £93,800.**

**2. Discretionary Services** – There has been a small increase to the Grounds Maintenance Contract at Northwood Recreation Ground and other green areas in Cowes of £282. To cover the annual play park fee, the Northwood Rec – Skate Park / MUGA / Outdoor Gym maintenance has increased by £1,500. The costs of cleaning Northwood Park toilets has increased by £1,200 as a new contractor will be appointed. Dog and litter bin emptying has increased by £1,000 to cover inflation. The funding of 50% for Princes Green Grounds Maintenance and Beach Cleaning of the coastal path, the total cost being £3,500 had not been requested in 2024 / 2025 so these figures have been removed from the budget for 2025 / 2026. The cost of cleaning the five public conveniences in Cowes has increased by £4,500 as a new contractor will be appointed. A new budget heading of 'Facilities Management' has been added with the cost estimated at £70,000. The cost of the Environment Officer Services has increased by £5,032. An increase of £1,000 has been

made to the 'Park Road Crossing Patrol' budget heading to cover a pay rise and on costs.

**The overall increase in this section being £81,014.**

**3. Town Improvements / Grants/ Special Events** – An increase of £500 has been made to the 'Picnic in the Park 2025' budget heading. **The overall increase in this section being £500.**

Overall within the three sections there is a proposed increase to the budget of £175,314 and the precept for 2025 / 2026 will be £531,214. The increase to a Band D property as result of this rise in the precept will be approximately £41.49 per year (£3.36p per month). The total precept for a Band D property would be approximately £125.72 per annum.

COWES TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET 2025-2026 DRAFT v1	
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>	
<b>GENERAL ADMINISTRATION</b>	
Town Clerks' salaries / NIC/ Tax / Pension	£ 140,000
Office Rent	£ 8,900
Stationery / Sundry Office Expenses/Software	£ 1,200
Office Equipment / Photocopier / Computers	£ 9,000
Telephone / Broadband / Website	£ 1,100
Postage	£ 300
Conference fees & Travelling	£ 500
Training	£ 1,000
Hire of Meeting Rooms and / or Zoom	£ 800
Subscriptions	£ 2,500
Insurance	£ 3,300
Audit and Accountancy	£ 2,500
Mayor's Allowance	£ 2,000
Newsletter / Publicity	£ 4,000
Elections / Admin Contingency	£ 16,000
Civic Regalia	£ 500
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>£ 193,600</b>
<b>DISCRETIONARY SERVICES</b>	
Grounds Maintenance: Northwood Rec; St Mary's Park; Moorgreen Reservoir; Arctic Park; Mornington Green; Brunswick Road playground; Park Road Rose Bed; Egypt Point; Mornington Woods	£ 16,582
Northwood Rec - Skate Park / MUGA / Outdoor Gym Maintenance	£ 7,500
Northwood Park Grounds Maintenance	£ 12,800
Northwood Park Toilets - Cleaning Only	£ 5,200
Dog + Litter bin emptying	£ 7,000
5 Public Toilets - Cleaning + other costs	£ 56,500
Facilities Management	£ 70,000
Cowes Library	£ 26,500
Cowes In Bloom	£ 12,000
Environment Officer	£ 10,032
Warmer Cowes	£ 500
Park Road Crossing Patrol	£ 6,000

Discretionary Services Contingency	£	8,000
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>238,614</b>
<b>TOWN IMPROVEMENTS / GRANTS / SPECIAL EVENTS</b>		
Street furniture maintenance	£	3,500
Cowes & Northwood Place Plan Promotion	£	12,000
Festive lights / Xmas Tree	£	17,000
New Projects	£	4,000
Grants	£	15,000
Remembrance Sunday & Charity Donations	£	2,000
Public Toilet refurbishment & Capital Projects	£	40,000
Picnic in the Park 2025	£	3,500
Flags, Banners and Bunting	£	2,000
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>99,000</b>
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>531,214</b>

It was:

**RECOMMENDED**

**That Cowes Town Council approves the draft budget v1 which will mean that the Cowes Town Council precept for 2025 – 2026 will be £531,214.**

**925 LLOYDS BANK TREASURERS ACCOUNT**

The Town Clerk circulated details received from Lloyds Bank informing the Town Council that the current 'Treasurers Account' is being changed to a 'Business Account'. The change, as from 14 January 2025, means that the Town Council will now pay certain charges for operating the account. There will be an account maintenance fee of £8.50 per month. A discount of 55% applies to the following charges until January 2026: direct debits £0.20; cash paid in-branch £1.50 for every £100; cash paid in immediate deposit £0.85 for every £100; cash paid out £1.50 for every £100; cash exchange fee £2.50 for every £100; cheques paid in-branch £1.00; cheques paid in immediate deposit £0.85; cheques paid out £1; payments received in-branch £0.85; payments received through immediate deposit is free; Bacs – Files batches of payments £5.50; Bacs for single payments £0.15. It was agreed:

**ACTION**

Subject to approval of the newly elected Town Council, the Town Clerk will change the bank mandate to enable online payments to be made by one authorised user as from May 2025.

Councillor Ellis left the meeting at 7.16pm.

**926 PUBLIC CONVENIENCE CLEANING CONTRACT AS FROM 1 APRIL 2025**

At the Finance, Acquisitions & Staffing Committee meeting on 22 October 2024, Councillors reviewed quotations from three contractors. It was agreed that the Town Clerk would seek references for contractors B and C. They will also be asked to provide a completed Supplier Evaluation form, proof of public liability insurance, proof of a waste disposal contract and their company's health and safety policy. The Town Clerk was also actioned to seek a further quotation for the cleaning contract. The Town Clerk advised that satisfactory references and documentation had been received for Contractor B, Contractor C remains outstanding. The additional quotation from Contractor D was reviewed but it was agreed not to proceed further. It was agreed:

ACTION

The Town Clerk will pursue the outstanding documents from Contractor C to enable a firm recommendation from the next Finance, Acquisitions & Staffing Committee meeting.

**927 UPDATE ON EXISTING HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND OF £5,000**

The Town Clerk gave Councillors an update on the Household Support Fund. Cowes Town Council had received £5,000; the Clerks have purchased vouchers to the value of £3,000, leaving £2,000 remaining for the purchase of further vouchers. The Clerks have handed out 44 vouchers from the 60 purchased, 16 remain available for issue.

**928 CHAIRMAN'S FINANCE TRAINING**

Councillor Carter, Chairman of the Finance, Acquisitions & Staffing Committee, attended a Finance training session organised by the Isle of Wight Association of Local Councils (IWALC) on 14 November 2024; slides from the training had been circulated to all Town Councillors. The Chairman found the training very useful and helped her to understand the local government finance and the law and the duties of the Responsible Financial Officer. This reinforced her belief that, for medium to large councils, it is sensible to have a separate Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer.

**929 OPPORTUNITIES TO PROVIDE SERVICES AND GENERATE INCOME FOR THE TOWN COUNCIL (MIN NO 921 REFERS)**

At the aforementioned Finance training, Councillor Carter advised that there had been a discussion about grants that may be available to Town & Parish Councils. It was agreed that there may be other services that the Town Council could offer and generate income by selling advertising space in the Town Council's newsletters. This may need to be held over until there are staff resources to take this forward.

It was agreed:

ACTIONS

1. Councillor Carter will forward contact details for possible grant applications.
2. The Town Clerk will investigate any available grants and report back to the next Finance, Acquisitions & Staffing Committee meeting.

**930 UPDATE REGARDING THE SPECIFICATION AND PRICES FOR FACILITIES MANAGEMENT SERVICES**

Councillors and the Deputy Town Clerk met with a local building company to discuss the provision of their facilities management service for the Town Council. The company had been asked to provide a specification and price for the provision of their services. However, it was felt that the specification should be provided by the Town Council and that three quotations would be required to satisfy the Town Council's Financial Regulations. It was agreed:

ACTION

Councillors Nicholson, Rafferty and the Deputy Town Clerk will prepare a specification for facilities management services.

**931 APPLICANTS FOR THE POST OF ADMIN ASSISTANT (20 HOURS PER WEEK)**

Following the advert for an Admin Assistant (20 hours per week), the Town Clerk has received seven applications. Following a short-listing exercise, using the person specification, only three applicants meet the criteria and are suitable for interview. It was agreed:

### ACTIONS

1. Councillors Carter and Nicholson and the Town Clerk will take part in the interviews, subject to availability, which will be organised for an early evening start.
2. The Town Clerk will contact the short-listed candidates with the date and time of their interviews.

### **932 TOWN COUNCIL'S RESOLUTION TO ADVERTISE FOR A FULL-TIME TOWN CLERK (MIN NO 9047 REFERS)**

At the Town Council meeting on 7 November 2024 it was resolved to advertise for a full-time Town Clerk. The Locum Town Clerk presented Councillors with a job description, person specification and advert for the post for their consideration. It was agreed:

#### ACTIONS

1. The Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer job description, person specification and advert is approved.
2. The Pay scale will be LC2, SCP 24 – 28 (£34,314 - £37,938 per annum) dependent on experience and qualifications.
3. The Locum Town Clerk will place the advert in the local media.

### **933 OTHER STAFFING MATTERS**

The issue of contact between the Town Council and traders in the High Street, which used to be undertaken by a Town Manager and later the IW Council's Environment Officer, was discussed. Traders do not feel a link is there now; however, a member of Community Action IW has been tasked with this role. It was agreed:

#### ACTION

The Town Clerk will ask for feedback from the Community Action IW Officer.

### **934 HEALTH AND SAFETY MATTERS**

The Lone Working Policy is still to be reviewed by the informal Chairs and Clerks meeting, followed by the Finance, Acquisitions & Staffing Committee, for resolution at a future Town Council meeting.

### **935 CLERKS' CONCERNS**

No concerns were raised by the Clerks.

### **936 ITEMS FOR INCLUSION ON FUTURE AGENDAS**

- Grants
- Lone Working Policy
- Feedback from Community Action IW Officer
- Ear marked funds for 2025 - 2026

The proceedings terminated at 8.03pm.

**CHAIRMAN**