

**MINUTES** of the **Finance, Staffing and Performance Management Committee** Meeting held on Thursday 3 January 2019 at 10:00 a.m. in the Shire House Suite, Shire House, Bodmin.

**PRESENT:** Chairman, Councillor A M Kerridge, presiding; together with Councillors P T Cooper, L L Frost, J R Gibbs (left at 3.47 p.m. and from item FSPM/2018/009), S H Kinsman, P L G Skea, K W Stubbs.

Councillors J P Cooper and D A Henderson (left at 1.00 p.m. and during item FSPM/2019/004) were also present but did not vote, not being a member of this Committee.

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Mr S Facer (Town Clerk), Mrs A Banks (Responsible Finance Officer (RFO)), Mr P Martin (Executive Support Officer (ESO)) and Mrs B Briggs (Senior Administration Assistant)

## **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS AND APOLOGIES**

There were no declarations of interest.

Councillor Kerridge had no announcements and apologies had been received from Councillors A J Coppin, J Gammon and Councillor J A Bassett although not a Member of the Committee.

### **FSPM/2019/001 Public Representation Session**

There were no members of the public present.

### **FSPM/2019/002 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **FSPM/2019/003 The Provisional 2019-20 Local Government Finance Settlement – Department for Communities and Local Government update, if any**

The Town Clerk reported that, as circulated to Members on 17 December 2018, a statement had been released by the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) which he read out as follows:

*“The Government has announced its draft Local Government Financial Settlement for 2019/20 which includes the welcome news that council referendum principles will not be applied to English towns and parishes. This honours its announcement in February that referendum principles would be deferred for three years, but the Government says this is subject to it seeing clear evidence of constraint in setting council tax increases.*

*County Councils and Unitary Authorities will be permitted increases of 3% before the principles apply and district councils in two-tier areas will be allowed increases of up to 3%, or up to and including £5, whichever is higher.*

*The full text of the draft Settlement says:*

*“In 2018-19, the Government decided to defer the setting of referendum principles for town and parish councils for three years. However, this was conditional upon:*

- *the sector taking all available steps to mitigate the need for council tax increases, including the use of reserves where they are not already earmarked for other uses or for “invest to save” projects which will lower ongoing costs; and*

- *the Government seeing clear evidence of restraint in the increases set by the sector. 3.2.7 In 2018-19, the average band D parish precept increased by 4.9% (£3.02). This compares to a 6.3% increase (£3.63) in 2017-18 and is the lowest year-on-year increase in parish precepts since 2015-16.*

*The Government has decided to continue the deferral of setting referendum principles for town and parish councils subject to the conditions above, but encourages parish councils to continue this downward trend, and will keep this area under active review.”*

The Town Clerk noted that this information needs to be considered against the Government’s wish for local Council’s to take on more devolved responsibility but the clear message was that they want to see restraint.

The Town Clerk also advised that the budget included adjustments to reflect the National Joint Council (NJC) agreement regarding adjustments to lower spinal column points relating to staff pay to ensure that local government workers on lower spinal column points were being remunerated in line with the National Minimum Wage and to bridge the gap with the National Living Wage.

The Chairman also noted that Bodmin Town Council (BTC) has traditionally held more devolved responsibilities than other town and parish Councils. The Town Clerk added that this has traditionally made Bodmin amongst the highest in terms of precept but, as other towns take on more devolved responsibility, Bodmin has dropped to around 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> on the list. It was also noted that Bodmin’s lower proportion of Band D properties and higher proportion of Band A and B properties work to Bodmin’s disadvantage in the statistics as the precept increase is calculated based on Band D properties.

FSPM/2019/004 **To consider the Draft Budget for 2019/20 – to include consideration of requests for financial assistance referred from various Council and Committee Meetings and to also include information received from Cornwall Council regarding Council Tax Benefit Support Grant and adjustments to the Tax Base for 2019/20**

Copies of a Draft Budget overview sheet and detailed budget were circulated at the meeting.

The RFO outlined that Members had been provided with the overview document to provide the headline figures for each section of the budget, providing a comparison with the 2018/19 budget and actuals for 2017/18 and current year to 30 November 2018.

The document containing the detailed budget had been colour-coded, with the pink lines being those that cannot be altered as they relate to financial commitments by the Council to contracts, subscriptions, utilities etc.

The RFO noted that she had not, as yet, included the sums of money the Council may wish to include in the budget to assist with achieving their aims and objectives and that Members needed to consider these alongside the necessary increases in budget elsewhere.

There was some discussion around the level of precept the Council would be willing to accept for the coming financial year. The RFO provided the previous two years’ figures, with the 2018-19 increase in precept on a Band D property

being 2.37% and the 2017-18 increase being 9.97%.

The RFO noted that the Council's current commitments, as already agreed, represented an increase on a Band D property of just over 4% for 2019-20 and the minimal increase they could hope to achieve was likely to be over 7%. The current increase on a Band D property currently stood at 9.96%.

The RFO outlined that the budget as it currently stands does not include all of the financial requirements for the Council's aims and objectives. She noted that the Council would need to agree at this meeting where they would like to include increases for the projects they wanted to priorities and achieve during the next financial year.

The Chairman noted that the Council did not have enough funds in their reserves to cover the cost of all the projects covered in their aims and objectives and that there would need to be some capital expenditure in order to deliver on them.

The Chairman then noted that the Council has traditionally worked to an annual budget but that, going forward, she would like to see the introduction of a 3 to 5 year budget, for forward planning, which she appreciated would be a significant piece of work for the RFO.

Members agreed that they would work through the budget line by line, adding and deducting money for projects where necessary and reviewing the precept increase in order to agree on the projects to prioritise. It was noted that some items would need to be considered against any ongoing costs and/or safety implications, and which ones would have to be held over to a future budget.

The Committee then proceeded to go through the draft estimates on a line by line/budget by budget basis – as follows:

**Line 29 – Mayoral & Civic – Wassail** – It was noted that, in previous years, the Town Clerk had traditionally been responsible for providing the catering for this event out of his own pocket based on the tradition of the Town Clerk to fill the wassail bowl with wine. Members felt that, although it was Council policy not to pay for the provision of alcohol at civic events, the cost of 'nibbles' and non-alcoholic drinks should be covered by Mayoral expenses and that bottles of wine be donated by Members in advance of the event, with the Town Clerk providing the bottle used to fill the bowl, in order to keep this tradition going. The Town Clerk responded to a question to advise that the cost in the past had been around £40.00 for food, orange juice etc and around 4 to 6 bottles of wine (£90.00 in total).

It was **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** including £200.00 in budget line 29 with the future view to raising the profile of this event and making it a civic event to celebrate the history of Wassail in the town.

**Line 42 – General Administration – Council Tax Support Grant from Cornwall Council** – it was noted that there had been a 9.4% decrease in this grant for 2019/20, equating to £7,602.89.

**Line 72 – General Administration – Website** – The RFO noted that this figure had been highlight in red as she is yet to confirm the exact costs of the new system. She noted that these costs should reduce with Council staff being able to manage online content within the office.

**Line 94 – General Administration – Neighbourhood Plan** – It was noted that no decision had been made at this stage as to whether Bodmin would commence with the creation of a Neighbourhood Plan but that sufficient funds should be budgeted should the decision be to proceed following public engagement. The RFO noted that there was £3,000.00 in the 2018/19 budget which had not yet been spent and at the present time, the costs to be incurred in the coming year were unknown.

Following discussion, it was **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** increasing budget line 94 from £3,000.00 to £6,000.00.

**Line 192 – Shire Hall – Vandalism** – The absence of an allocated sum to this line was queried, with the RFO explaining that vandalism is budgeted as a lump sum and that costs are allocated throughout the year depending on the property damaged. Members requested that true costs of vandalism be recorded to include staff time spent on rectifying damage. The RFO noted that this would be a significant task as staff do not currently complete timesheets allocating their time to individual tasks. Members requested that, as these costs had an effect on the precept, the parks team make a note of time spent on vandalism related issues going forward in order to be able to move towards assigning costs to damage as a result of vandalism.

Following discussion, it was **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** that this matter be referred to the Properties Committee for further discussion.

**Line 203 – Capital Loan Repayment Fund** – The RFO noted that the early repayment figure was reviewed each year and compared against the cost of future interest on the loan. The RFO reported that the current variance, with an early repayment figure of £103,000.00 compared to future interest of £42,000.00.

Therefore it was not recommended to repay the loan early at this time.

**Line 339 – Museum – Donations** – The RFO noted that this expenditure was for the Museum's rent. Members raised the damp issues experienced by the Museum and felt that the new landlord has a duty to resolve these issues.

It was **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** that the Town Clerk contact Merlin Cinemas to follow up on this issue on behalf of the Museum.

**Line 381 – Narisa Hall – General Rates** – The RFO noted that, should the property be let, the tenant would be responsible for these rates so this would provide a cost saving to the Council compared to the budget, but that since no lease had yet been agreed these costs should be included in the budget.

**Line 399 – Recreation and Sport – Donations** – It was noted that this fund was previously allocated to fund the creation of the new Skate Park and it had been agreed that this would now be funded from the proceeds of the sale of the Public Rooms.

Following discussion, it was **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** that budget lines 395-402 be removed from the 2020/21 budget.

**Line 551 – Parks and Open Spaces – Replacement Machinery (Rolling Program)** – The RFO explained that, prior to the recruitment of the current Parks and Open Spaces Manager (POSM), no equipment had been replaced for a number of years so the team were currently catching up on items requiring

replacement. The machinery maintenance budget had been increased in previous years (around 7) but with no new purchases. In addition, there was historically no reserve so it was necessary to build up a reserve to ensure future repairs and replacements would be covered. She noted that this budget could reduce in future years once all the equipment was fit for purpose. She confirmed that the team considers overall operating costs to ensure value for money when repairing/replacing equipment.

There was some discussion about the possibility of reducing this budget by £10,000.00, given the other commitments by the Council in the coming financial year and the projects they wished to achieve, with more money being allocated to this budget in the future years in order to build up a reserve. The RFO noted that at this reduction would mean there was no provision for unexpected costs in the coming year and recommended that a sinking fund be considered again in future budget years.

Following discussion, it was **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** that budget line 551 be reduced from £40,000.00 to £30,000.00.

**Line 552 – Parks and Open Spaces – Bodmin Cycling Project: Tour of Britain** – It was queried as to whether money should be allocated to this line based on the recent recommendation from the Council that Bodmin host the finish of the Cornish leg of the race in 2020 and the likelihood of this being agreed by Cornwall Council. The RFO reported that there was currently £2,500.00 allocated to this project in earmarked reserves.

The Town Clerk advised that when this was discussed previously, the estimated contribution from each town was around £5,000 as match funding.

Following discussion, it was **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** that £2,500.00 be added to budget line 552 for a potential Tour of Britain event.

**Line 557 – Parks and Open Spaces – Environmental Improvements** – It was noted that this line had previously related to specific projects which had now been completed in conjunction with local community groups, and that ongoing costs for this were covered under line 562.

It was **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** that budget line 557 be reduced from £3,000.00 to £0.00.

**Line 558 – Parks and Open Spaces – Multi Use Ball Court** – It was noted that the sum required for this project had been reached over the previous two financial years. However, the estimated costs for this project had been received some time ago so it was felt prudent to leave a reduced sum in the budget to cover inflation in costs. Any location for this type of facility could be considered through Committee in the future.

Following discussion, it was **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** that budget line 558 be reduced from £11,000.00 to £3,000.00.

**Line 564 – Parks and Open Spaces – Replacement Trees/New Planting** – The RFO noted that this line could be removed due to inclusion of these costs in line 521.

Following discussion, it was **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** that budget line 564 be reduced from £1,000.00 to £0.00.

**Line 778 – Cemetery Services – Interments** – It was noted that the income from interments was anticipated to be higher than budgeted.

It was **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** that budget line 778 be increased from £3,500.00 to £4,500.00 to reflect higher anticipated income from interments.

**Line 786 – Cemetery Services – Professional Fees** – It was noted that this budget included the safety testing of memorials over a rolling 5 year period as well as the survey and works required for a new cemetery site.

Regarding the safety testing, it was noted that cost of training for the Parks and Open Spaces Manager and Supervisor in safety testing of memorials was allocated to line 787 and that the costs for line 786 could be reviewed in future years once this training was complete and in consideration of the staff hours involved in moving this project forward should the decision be made to move responsibility of this project in-house.

The Town Clerk noted that a paper would be brought to a future FS&PM meeting which would review the current cemetery charges and the importance of working towards a cost neutral cemetery service was noted.

**Line 829 – St Petroc’s Closed Churchyard – Maintenance of Grounds** – It was noted that this budget included allowance for any unforeseen repairs that might be required. Members queried whether the maintenance of the grounds could be done in a more cost effective way. The RFO reported that bringing the grass cutting in house would result in 207 hours of staff time. It was noted that this had been discussed with the POSM previously but that the Town Clerk would discuss it with him again, and meet with the St Petroc’s Building Manager should it be necessary prior to setting the 2020/21 budget.

**Line 858 – Public Conveniences & Environmental Health – Servicing Contracts** – The RFO noted that this line had not been increased by inflation and would be increased by 6% from £24,321.17 to £25,780.44.

**Line 876 – Fair Park Toilets – Property Repairs and Maintenance** – The RFO noted that the monies allocated to both the Fair Park and Priory Park toilets could be renamed in the earmarked reserves and used for either/both projects as required.

**Line 917 – Higher Bore Street Toilets – Property Repairs and Maintenance** – Councillor P T Cooper queried whether there would be a possibility of working with IntoBodmin to create community toilets with a link to the Old Library, feeling that this would offer a good solution to maintaining the least used toilets. Some Members felt that this would not be feasible for a number of reasons i.e. as the Old Library has onsite toilet facilities and their remoteness from the Higher Bore Street location and accessibility for management. Councillor P T Cooper indicated he would make contact with IntoBodmin to discuss the suggestion with them.

The Chairman noted that further discussion could take place at committee level and that Councillor Cooper should report back to a future Properties Committee meeting.

**Line 948 – Flowerbeds and Floral Displays – Carriage** – It was noted that this budget was to create a composting facility at the Poors Field site. Members

queried whether this project should be put on hold as it was not one of the Council's key objectives. It was noted that the Parks Team were purchasing a new mini digger and there was the possibility that this work could be undertaken in-house in the future.

It was **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** putting this project on hold and reducing this budget line from £3,000.00 to £0.00.

**Line 957 – Christmas Lighting – Donations** – It was noted that this budget line was to provide the Christmas Lights Committee with the funding to conduct anchor testing of the fixing points used to display the town's Christmas lights.

It was **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** that this donation should be drawn down from existing reserves rather than allocating within the 2019/20 budget and that budget line 957 be reduced from £4,000.00 to £0.00.

It was further **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** that the POSM be given delegated authority to proceed with this work.

**Line 971 – Community Transport: Bus shelters – Minor Equipment Purchases** – Members discussed whether there was the possibility of discussing management of Town Council bus shelters with Cornwall Council, who work with advertising company Fernbank and can therefore generate income from their bus shelters. Councillor L L Frost was asked to make enquires in his capacity as Cornwall Councillor and would report back to a future Properties Committee meeting.

It was **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** leaving this line in the current budget with the view to investigating potential cost savings in future years.

**Line 998 – CCTV – Equipment Repairs and Maintenance** – It was noted that the additional new camera funded by the Section 106 monies from Aldi and that the Town Council were awaiting this money being passported from Cornwall Council. There was some discussion around a second additional camera. It was noted that an additional CCTV system had been agreed to address the vandalism issues at Narisa Hall and that, at this time, another camera was not necessary at this additional expense. It was also noted that a mobile solution could be explored to target specific issues, as and when they arose.

Following discussion, it was **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** that budget line 998 be reduced from £2,651.93 to £0.00.

**Line 1030 – Priory Car Park – Rent** – It was noted that, as yet, the discussion with the bike hire company has not yet resulted in a rental/lease within Priory Car Park and therefore this should not be reflected in the budget at this time.

It was **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** that budget line 1030 be reduced from £6,006.37 to £3,506.37.

**Line 1044 – Priory Car Park – Maintenance of Grounds** – It was noted that some patching work had been done during the current financial year that and that this money was to add into reserves as ongoing maintenance and resurfacing works could prove very expensive. Members discussed the fact that the total resurfacing of Priory II Car Park was not one of the Council's key objectives for the coming year and therefore this budget could be reduced.

Following discussion, it was **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** that budget line 1044 be reduced from £30,000.00 to £15,000.00.

It was further **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** referring the potential future use of Priory II Car Park to the Properties Committee for further consideration.

**Line 1115 – Other Operational Services** – The RFO requested a decision from Members regarding the disposal of the baby grand piano located in the Shire House Suite. She noted that the previous decision had been to offer the piano to local schools/community groups, none of whom had required it. As such, the RFO sought approval to dispose of the piano via eBay.

It was **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** offering the piano for sale on eBay. Should this not result in a successful sale, it was further **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** the RFO be given delegated authority to dispose of the piano in the most appropriate manner.

**Line 1122 – Large Revenue Items – Contingency Fund** – The RFO noted that the Council does not currently have available funds for all the projects it wishes to complete. It was noted that a significant cost to be incurred going forward would be the purchase of land for a new cemetery site.

Members felt it was prudent to allocate some money to the budget for this purpose, given the urgency of identifying and acquiring a new site. The costs of this project were as yet unknown but it was considered that they would be significant considering the purchase of the land and subsequent required works. It was estimated that costs for this project could be anywhere up to £500,000.00 including purchase of land and associated landscaping works.

Following discussion, it was **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** that an additional line be added under line 1124 and £20,000.00 allocated to this line for the funding of a new cemetery.

Due to the confidential nature of the next business, it was **RESOLVED** to go into Committee. Please see separate page.