

Finance & Governance Committee

Present: Cllrs Chapman, Collins, Cooper-Marsh (Chair), Goodman, Hitchin, Pitt.

Absent: Cllr Banks, Kumar and Maslen

In attendance: Town Clerk, Responsible Finance Officer, Priory and Eatons Centre General Manager

Minutes of the meeting of the **Finance & Governance committee** held on **Tuesday 19th November** at **7.15pm** in the Eaton's Centre, The Maltings, St Neots, PE19 8ES.

Public Participation

There was one member of the public present.

ACTIONS

067 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllrs Banks, Kumar and Maslen.

Admin

068 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Pitt declared an interest in agenda item 6 as portfolio at District Council which also provides funding to the Citizens Advice Rural Cambridgeshire and would not take part in a vote on the matter.

Cllr Goodman declared an interest in agenda item 6 as a member of Huntingdonshire Volunteer Centre and would not take part in a vote on the matter.

069 Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the 22nd October 2024 as a true and accurate record.

Chairman proposed and it was agreed to move agenda item up the agenda as a member of the public was present with an interest.

070 Internal Audit

Members received and noted the outcome report of an internal audit carried out in October 2024 by an external auditor.

RFO

071 Payments

Members received and noted payments for September 2024.

Admin

072 Service Level Agreements

Members received and considered additional information provided in response to queries the committee had raised when considering potential Service Level Agreements to recommend as part of the 2024-25 budget.

Members considered information from the following organisations which it was currently engaging with;

- i) Citizens Advice Rural Cambridgeshire



Members considered the responses to questions raised. A Member expressed concern over not having sight of SLA's with other funding bodies and a clear understanding of what those SLA's provide for. There is a risk of duplication of funding. A Member commented that there was an SLA between CARC and HDC which provided for increased face to face services and St Neots once one of the appropriate locations identified. HDC's funding provides one day a week's face to face CARC service.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the Council budget £10,000 for a Service Level Agreement with Citizens Advice Rural Cambridgeshire, with funding subject to the agreement of a formal Service Level Agreement.

i) Money Advice St Neots

Members received and considered further information provided by the organisation, particular around the funding breakdown and the level of benefit the Council's funding would deliver based on average clients helped and debt dealt with.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the Council budget £10,000 for a Service Level Agreement with Money Advice St Neots, with funding subject to the agreement of a formal Service Level Agreement.

ii) Huntingdonshire Volunteer Centre (HVC)

Members considered the additional information provided on the car share scheme. A Member commented that the annual accounts for the organisation were good and clearly identified income. Members noted that level of funding contributed by other Town and Parish Councils. Members noted the income and expenditure for the car scheme and that the organisation was clear that the income from a charity shop in Huntingdon does not contribute to the delivery of the St Neots car scheme.

Members discussed the lease with the (HVC) for premises at South Street and that the value of this should be represented as a grant and returning rent income. Members did not feel they have enough information on the value of the building to include this and asked the Clerk to do further research and report back.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the Council budget £10,000 for a Service Level Agreement with Huntingdonshire Volunteer Forum, with funding subject to the agreement of a formal Service Level Agreement.

073 Reserves

Members received and noted Council Reserves and earmarked reserves as of 30th September 2024.



074 Fees and Charges

Members received and considered recommendations on fees and charges applied by the Council for the following services;

- i) **RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that the Council increase cemetery fees by 5% for the 2025-26 financial year.
- ii) **RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that the Council do not increase allotment rents for the 2025-26 financial year following the large percentage increase in the current financial year.
- iii) **RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that the Council do not increase farm and craft market pitch fees for the 2025-26 financial year.
- iv) **RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that the Council do not increase hall hire charges Eatons Community Centre for the 2025-26 financial year.
- v) Members considered event fees and charges and commented that it was appropriate to delegate the pitch fees for events to officers as it varied from event to event. It was suggested that a bar pitch could be based on an income percentage split basis.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND event fees and charges as proposed and to delegate that officers use their discretion for pitch fees at Council events. This was to reflect the many and varied events that the council puts on.

075 Youth Work Budget 2025-2026

- i) Members received and noted a report from the Town Clerk on including budgets for the delivery of Youth Work in the 2024-25 budget.
- ii) Members received and noted current and anticipated year-end youth budget expenditure for 2024-25. Members commented that the work undertaken was positive and it is a good investment in our town.
- iii) Members received and considered a proposal and budget request from the Engagement and Participation Youth Work on youth projects to be delivered in 2025-2026 and budgeted for as part of the 2025-2026 budget.

The Town Clerk explained that the costs of delivering youth work had not been included in the draft budget yet as the Council funded sessions and projects through the General Reserve for the 2024-25 financial year.

Members discussed the value of youth work and raised questions about participation numbers and locations young people were coming from across the town to participate. Cllr Mascarenhas was invited to address the committee and outlined the numbers of young people participating in youth cafes and other projects run. It was highlighted that there needed to be further focus engaging with young people in the Eatons.



A Member commented that the Council needs to frame what it wants from youth delivery. A key ambition was the creation of more open access activities. This has happened with youth cafes, multisport and detached youth work. However, some of the work undertaken and future work proposed is through targeted smaller groups. The Council needs to consider if it wants to achieve some of the new projects which are more specialised.

Members felt the budgets proposed looked reasonable and understand that refreshments are a way of getting young people engaged and participating.

Members debated how to set out a budget and whether there should be a budget allocation for projects which allows for flexible use or whether more detailed budget allocation for projects is needed. A Member commented that the council needed to know if projects were to change so the budget could be reallocated within the agreed budget level. It was agreed regular discussion and reporting would help address this.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND the Council include a budget of £25,000 for youth project work in the 2025-26 budget.

076 Budget Setting 2024-2025

Members received and considered the draft 2025-26 budget and recommendations from committees which formed part of that draft budget.

The RFO explained that salary figures are draft and include a percentage increase based on the current budgets which were on target following the 2024-25. The salary budget will be presented to the Personnel committee may change, but not anticipating any material changes. Members expressed some concern over the potential increase that could come from National Insurance contributions.

Members considered Community Centre cost centres. (501, 504, 520, 525, 350, 360) as the General Manager for the Priory and Eatons Centre (GM) was present. The RFO explained that cost centre 501 included a 3% increase as salaries were within the cost centre.

Members noted that the majority of costs in cost centre 504 had been reduced to zero as the Priory Centre would not be operating. However, there were still some utility, business rates and insurance costs the Council may need to cover for budget had been allowed.

Members reviewed Cost Centre 520, which covered New Street income and expenditure. The GM explained the income per head had increased from an average of £2.60 to £6.50 since opening the temporary mini-Priory Centre and reminded Members of the reasons for the New Street Offering, which included support community groups who used the Priory Centre, offering available hireable community space and putting in place customer and systems ahead of returning to the redeveloped Priory Centre.

Members discussed cost associated with operating the building and the need to break even, including reviewing staffing costs, catering costs, cost of sales and income generated. A Member commented they would like to see more ambitious income targets.

Members deferred making recommendation on the Priory Centre and New Street cost centres and asked officers to review and look at ways of reducing costs or generating income.

Town
Clerk/RFO/
GM

Members reviewed the remainder of the draft budget and highlighted the following areas for further review and reporting by officers on whether reductions could be made;

- VE Day 80 – Is the Council planning to undertake a memorial/celebration event each year on significant dates? Can the budget be reduced in line with D Day 80 costs.
- Staff Training budget – This was fully spent in the last financial year but underspent in the current. Is further training planned.
- Street furniture – Duplicate budgets in different cost centres with low spend. Is further spend anticipated in the current financial year?
- Highway Improvements – There is a high reserve, can the revenue budget be reduced. The Clerk commented that the Council had a number of successful bids which would use a significant amount of the reserves, but that he would investigate and report back to the committee.

Town Clerk /
RFO

The following budget recommendations were resolved;

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the Market Square Launch Event revenue budget for 2025-26 is reduced to £6,000 and an allocation of £9,000 from earmarked reserves 'Vibrant Community' funding is used to support the cost of the event.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the Grant Aid Budget is reduced by £20,000 for the 2025-26 financial year in recognition of the inclusion of budgets for specific Service Level Agreements.

077 Flower Overspend

Members received a report from the Town Clerk on overspend in the planting budget which arose following the need to move from growing plants internally to sourcing them from an external provider. The Council did not budget for this provision as it was not aware of the change in situation at the time it set its 2024-25 budget.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the Council approve an overspend in the planting budget of £6,076 resulting from the change to sourcing plants externally.

078 Cemetery Regulations

Members received and considered a recommendation from the Operations and Amenities Committee that the Council adopt revised Burial Regulations for St Neots Town Council's cemeteries.



A Member proposed that the Committee recommend the Burial Regulations for adoption subject to amending that the period a former resident.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND the Council adopt the St Neots Lawn Cemetery Regulations subject to amending that the former resident fee level will be applied if the deceased lived within St Neots within the previous 5 years, rather than 3 years as current stated.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND the Council adopt the St Neots Old & New, Eynesbury, and Eaton Socon Cemetery Regulations subject to amending that the former resident fee level will be applied if the deceased lived within St Neots within the previous 5 years, rather than 3 years as current stated.

079 Date of Next Meeting

Members noted that the date of the next scheduled Finance and Governance Committee meeting would be 10th December 2024 at 7:15pm.

COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON