

Finance & Governance Committee

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

Absent: Cllr Kumar

In attendance: Town Clerk, Responsible Finance Officer, Operations Manager, Senior Maintenance Technician

Minutes of the meeting of the **Finance & Governance committee** held on **Tuesday 22nd October** 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

055 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Kumar.

Admin

056 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Pitt declared an interest in agenda item 8 as organiser of St Neots Festival which previously received grant funding from the Council.

Cllr Goodman declared an interest in agenda item 7 as a Member of Huntingdonshire Volunteer Centre.

057 Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the 17th September 2024 as a true and accurate record.

058 Payments

Members received and noted payments for July 2024 and August 2024.

Raised question on the costs of cost of migrating server. It was explained that the server is cloud based but a new one needed to be built which was compatible with HMRC's reporting system.

059 Grant Application

Members received and considered a grant application from Relate Cambridgeshire for funding towards low-cost counselling. The application had been deferred by the Grants Sub-Committee with a request for additional information, which had been provided by the applicant and shared with Members.

A representative of the Charity addressed the committee to explain the work of Relate and the need for a grant. Relate delivers Counselling sessions across Cambridgeshire and is seeking funding for a bursary to help lower the cost of sessions for St Neots residents referred to the service. A sessions costs £75 to the Charity and a fee of £40 is sought from clients. However, this can still be out of the reach of many

and the bursary would be used to help lower the session cost. At present anywhere between 30-40% of sessions would be subsidised. 163 appoints have been delivered to St Neots residents during the reporting period.

An individual view is taken on each session and whether it is subsidised by £35.

It was proposed and seconded that £1,800 be granted from the general grants fund to create a bursary for St Neots residents to receive counselling.

A Member commented that they fully supported the work of the Charity, but the Council must be careful not to breach its grant aid policy. The Council should be satisfied that this funding is for a bursary which is delivered on a case-by-case basis and not operational costs.

RESOLVED to award a grant of £1,800 to Relate Cambridgeshire from the Small Grant Aid Scheme budget for the purpose of funding a bursary for St Neots residents to receive subsidised counselling through the charity.

060 **Museum Funding**

Members received and considered a report from the Town Clerk which set out a funding request from St Neots Museum in relation to the Council's annual grant funding which helped fund the ongoing operations of the museum.

A Member asked whether it would be possible to get an average on the relevant sector pay increases. Members are keen to link budget increases to realistic sector wage growth.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the Council increase the Museum Grant budget (230-4351) by £3,860 for the 2025/26 budget year and that this increase is factored into the overall budget to be considered at the next Finance and Governance Committee meeting.

061 **Service Level Agreements**

Members received and considered initial approaches from three organisations seeking funding which sits outside the Council's Grant Aid Scheme. In such cases, where the funding is not eligible for a grant award, the Council will consider whether it may be minded providing funding as part of its budget setting process through a Service Level Agreement (SLA).

Members considered each organisation individually and agreed the Finance and Governance Committee would be minded to further consider recommending entering a Service Level Agreement with each organisation, subject to further information coming forward.

Members stressed that any potential SLA should be set up as an offer or 'package' the Council could fund, clearly demonstrating what the Council's money was going to provide and the outcomes from that.



i) Money Advice St Neots

Members commented that they would like to know a more specific breakdown of what the funding will be used for in terms of hours delivered and tied to a specific outcome that can be measured. Members would expect an SLA to identify how many sessions the Councils funding would facilitate and how many residents would be helped.

Members commented that to progress consideration of an SLA to the next state they would want to know;

- More detail on the level of debts that have been dealt with on average for individuals helped. Specifically, what is the average level of debt of the 211 people helped. Members felt this would help make sense of the impact the service has for residents.
- The number of sessions the Council's funding would fund and the impact of those.

ii) Rural Cambridgeshire Citizens Advice Bureau

Members noted there was potential the organisation may be in a position to take lease of a building in St Neots and if this happened it would mean the cost of providing the additional days face to face service would be reduced. At this stage it was unknown if this would progress.

A Member commented that proportionally it was hard to understand the value received for the £10,000 put in. However, another Member commented that they felt the 'offer' made was the clearest of the three being considered. The funding which would be provided by the Council would be a specific and clear thing which could be measured against delivery. The costs provided were clearly linked to the additional service and value the Town Council would be providing for the community.

Members commented that to progress consideration of an SLA to the next state they would want to know;

- How many days/weeks a year do the organisation operate the face-to-face day.
- The number of appointments delivered in a day.
- How many face to face appointments can't take place based on the current one day a week provision.

If an SLA is agreed it must be clear that the funding is to provide an additional second days face to face appointments on top of the current one day a week funded by HDC.

iii) Huntingdonshire Volunteer Centre

A Member commented that as the Council provides free accommodation for the organisation the value of this financial support should be shown when considering any further funding. As part of the process the Council



should consider aligning the process for rent of the building with other leases it has in place with community groups.

A Member commented focusing on the car scheme in terms of the funding from the Council was a sensible approach as this was something tangible that could be measured, and for which benefit from any funding could be evidenced.

Members felt more information and financial breakdowns were needed as part of progressing an SLA to the next level. Members commented that to progress consideration of an SLA to the next state they would want to know;

A more defined breakdown of the marketing costs and what marketing is undertaken (marketing campaigns, where is the car sharing scheme advertised etc) There needs to be more specific information around what is being produced and costs.

A clear breakdown of income and expenditure for the Car Share scheme, showing the amount of income from amounts charged per journey and any other income set against the expenditure for the scheme. This is to demonstrate where the funding gap is that needs addressing.

Cllr Maslen left the meeting at 21:15

062 Event Grant Funding

Members received and considered a report from a Working Group set up to consider how the Council may consider and award annual funding to community events which are not eligible for funding under the Council's grant aid scheme. While an organisation can apply to the small grant aid scheme on an annual basis, large grants of over £2,000 can only be applied for every other year. These impacts funding the council has historically granted to community events on an annual basis.

When agreeing the amended grant aid scheme procedure Councillors acknowledged that they would consider funding for specific annual community events supported by the Council separately as part of the budget process each year.

Members considered the proposed procedure, and it was clarified that;

- In September each year any eligible organisation will be invited to make a funding request and presentation to the Promotion and Events Committee.
- The Promotion and Events committee will consider the eligibility of the proposed event, its community value and offer.
- The Promotion and Events Committee will make recommendations to the Finance and Governance Committee on whether funding for any event should be put forward to the budget setting process.
- The Finance and Governance Committee will consider any recommendation received in the context of the overall budget and make recommendations to the Full Council.

Any organisation is welcome to attend but the purpose of the process is to provide a way those organisations/events which are not eligible for the grant aid scheme can seek funding. In the first instance any organisation should be directed to the Grant Aid Scheme.

It was noted that for the upcoming financial year the Promotion and Events Committee would need to consider any funding requests from identified organisations at its November meeting.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the Council approves the draft procedure outlining the consideration of grant funding for annual events which exceed £2,000 and are not eligible for funding under the Council's Grant Aid policy.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the Council approve the draft criteria that must be met for the awarding of funding for an event.

063 **Priory Centre Budgets**

Members received and considered Priory Centre budgets as at the end of July 2024 when the Centre ceased trading. Members noted that income budgets were on target or exceeded the budgeted income. There were also overspends in catering and café costs, which were partly impacted by reduced budgets in anticipation of closing and the close and relocation itself.

Members noted that one the HDC contribution was factored in the position at the end of July 2024 would be a small surplus. However, staffing and utility costs will continue to be incurred during the Priory Centre redevelopment.

A Member commented that the figures were healthy, and it was a positive position.

064 **Operational Equipment**

Members received and considered a report from the Town Clerk which set out a request that the Council invest in a new item of operational equipment that will help the operations team carry out their duties and provide efficiencies in the services the Council undertakes.

The Operations Manager and Senior Maintenance Technician were present to speak on the matter and take questions from Members. Members commented that they were in support of an investment that would provide efficiencies in the team and allow them to undertake work that there currently isn't time to address, more traditional operations work and take on additional and more varied work.

The Operations Manager highlighted several outstanding jobs that are difficult to progress with the current pressures on the team. The proposed equipment would not only speed up time consuming jobs such as hedge cutting, it would also reduce the number of operatives needing to spend time on those jobs. This would allow the Operations Manager to reallocate resource to other areas. The Operations Manager commented the equipment, its capability and the efficiency it offers would allow the team to help improve St Neots public realm.

A Member queried whether the model proposed was the right model and if it could be bought seconded had. The Chairperson of Operations and Amenities Commented that the Committee had consider a lease option, but it was not felt this would offer best value to the Council.

A Member queried the goal of making the team more efficient and the benefit that has for residents versus the cost. If more resource is to be freed up then how will this benefit residents. The Senior Maintenance Technician highlighted jobs that need to be undertaken such as new bins and regular treating of benches that resource could be freed up for which would improve the public street scene.

Members discussed challenges around storage of the equipment. It was noted that floor space could be freed by up staking as the equipment is a forklift. A Member commented that this may create some issues with access to certain things if the machinery is in use and off site. The Operations Manager would need to manage this.

A Member raised benefits around health and safety for maintenance technicians.

It was proposed and seconded that the Committee recommend the purchase of the proposed equipment and that it is funded from the Council's General Reserves.

A Member asked that the recommendation to Council is accompanied by some additional detail on specific benefits that would arise as a result of using the equipment and the benefits to residents.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that to facilitate the Operations Team's efficient and flexible delivery of services the Council purchase an Avant-AV 760I and suitable attachments at a cost of £60,627 from the Council's General Reserve.

065 External Audit

Members received and noted the outcome of the 2023/24 external audit and that there were no actions or recommendations arising from the audit. Thanks were expressed to all those officers involved in the auditing process.

066 Equipment Hire Policy

Members received and considered a draft equipment hire policy for Council equipment which had been recommended for adoption by the Operations and Amenities Committee. It was commented that appendix a was not available and queried whether this could be brought forward for consideration as part of the policy. A member also requested that any costs linked to the hire out of equipment be included.

Members discussed the replacement of equipment when it is broken while used by a hirer. It may be that the equipment itself is old and should depreciation on the value of the asset be recognised.

Members requested that the specific reference to 'May Day' is removed from the policy.



Members asked that an amended policy be brought back to the Committee.

067 Date of Next Meeting

Members noted that the date of the next scheduled Finance and Governance Committee meeting would be 19th November 2024 at 7:15pm.

COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON