

**MEETING OF THE FINANCE AND GRANTS COMMITTEE OF ABERTILLERY AND
LLANHILLETH COMMUNITY COUNCIL HELD ON 27 October 2022 at 6.00 pm in the
Council Chamber at Council Offices, Mitre Street, Abertillery.**

PRESENT

Councillors: Glyn Smith (Chair), Peter Adamson, Rob Phillips, Mariola Walters

Officers: David Cartwright (Clerk)

Absent: Graham White

14. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST OR DISPENSATIONS

Rob Phillips declared a personal interest in item 18 as he had submitted the application for a ward grant to The Food Cupboard and is secretary of the Abertillery Rock and Blues Festival.

16. MINUTES 15 JUNE 2022 AND 6 OCTOBER 2022

The Committee **RESOLVED** to confirm the minutes of 15 June 2022 as a correct record.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to confirm the minutes of 6 October 2022 as a correct record.

17. DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS

The Committee considered draft budget proposals as presented by budget holders.

People and Communities Committee draft budget proposals 2023-24

Tracey Dyson, Chair of the People and Places Committee, explained that proposals for a significant increase in the Christmas lights budget line arose from an outline quote from a potential contractor who had highlighted the potential need to renew much of the lighting infrastructure. The Committee recommended that further indicative quotes be sought and that the budget line should also take account of the likely downward pressure on prices that would be achieved by competitive tendering.

The Committee appreciated that, as the Loneliness Project had only recently held its initial meeting, forecasting expenditure for 2023-24 was difficult. They hoped that the project's progress would be used to begin to focus the budget line over the next two months.

The Committee was of the opinion that they would find it difficult to support a significant budget line to upgrade the Council's website unless the required work was fully scoped and accurately costed.

The Committee noted that initial talks had taken place about staging a community fun run based in Soffryd but that plans were still in outline form. They recommended that concrete proposals with accurate costings were required.

Tracey Dyson explained that the draft 'Community summer cinema events' budget line was indicative at this stage as The Met had been unable, as yet, to provide costings of cinema events for children from the local community.

Tracey Dyson explained that the proposed Party in the Park budget line reflected plans to expand the event to include more participative activities for children and increased advertising to encourage attendance from families outside Abertillery town. The projected costs were known but discussions within the People and Places Committee as to whether to press ahead with the plans were on-going.

The Clerk agreed to email Ben Owen-Jones and Barrie Page regarding the Committee's recommendations about scoping and costing budget lines.

PlaCE Committee draft budget proposals 2023-24

Peter Adamson explained that the PlaCE Committee's Town in Bloom Working Group had undertaken an appraisal of the contractor's work to date. The working group was aware of issues in some areas but was confident that the project remained good value for money and fully supported renewing the contractor's contract for a third year. Community involvement in Town in Bloom had begun to take off in late summer and the increased budget line reflected the working group's confidence in wider interest from local community groups in 2023-24.

Rob Phillips, Chair of the PlaCE Committee, explained that they had identified a number of potential environmental projects for 2023-24 such as introducing floral displays to currently-unused patches of land and supporting local community volunteers to clear and reopen Abertillery's Green Walk. The proposed budget line reflected the projected costs of hiring or purchasing items such as brush-cutting and safety equipment. A significant amount had been included in this budget line for a feasibility study into restoring the mosaic mural at the pedestrian subway under the A467 in Abertillery. Forthcoming meetings with officers of Blaenau Gwent Council and representatives of the Ebbw Fach Trail Group would enable the Committee to firm up these proposals. The Committee recommended that some further work be done to clarify how local community volunteers would be recruited to take part in proposed environmental projects and recommended consideration of making provision for paid-for social media advertising.

Rob Phillips advised that the PlaCE Committee was likely to add an extra budget line of £5,000 to its proposals for funding for a feasibility study into a local community transport scheme in response to the Welsh Government's National Transport Delivery Plan.

Youth Engagement draft budget proposals 2023-24

The Committee praised the work of the Youth Engagement Working Group in improving appraisal and evaluation of Council-funded youth work. The Committee noted that the projects were playing a major role in engaging young people in the community council area and that the results have exceeded expectations. Increasing the provision would, inevitably, mean greater staff costs and a step-change in expenditure. The Committee recommended that the new Youth and Community Engagement Committee should investigate whether the current and long-term (e.g., decreased criminal behaviour in adulthood) financial benefits of Council-funded youth work could be quantified.

Responsible Financial Officer draft budget proposals 2023-24

As the Council's Responsible Financial Officer, the Clerk said that the draft proposals for 2023-24 largely reflected forecast expenditure for the current financial year plus an adjustment for forecast inflation. Some items had been included in the 2022-23

budget as a contingency should the local elections generate a much-changed Council. The Clerk proposed removing or reducing these budget lines for 2023-24.

Officers' salaries were set according to the NJC national pay scale. Pay claims from two previous years had been settled in 2022-23 and the pay claim for the current year was expected to be settled shortly. The national pay scales were, therefore, forecast to be significantly higher in 2023-24 than the pay scales that were used to forecast salary costs when the budget for 2022-23 was set.

The Clerk noted that, for a number of years, the Council had budgeted £10,000 for Council Grants. Actual expenditure on this budget line in each of the last three years had been approximately £7,000. One reason for the shortfall was the fact that Council Grants were for applications up to £1,000 while Solar Farm Grants were for applications of £5,000 and over. Projects requiring support of between £1,000 and £5,000 were not catered for. The Clerk was, therefore, proposing that the Council budgeted for expenditure of £7,000 on smaller Council Grants in 2023-24 but changed its grant criteria and set aside a further £10,000 to enable it to accommodate applications of between £1,000 and £5,000.

The Clerk reminded the Committee that the Council was required to include full provision for Members' Allowances in its budget each year even though only a fraction of the allowances were ever claimed. The (much lower) forecast expenditure on these budget lines could be used when calculating the Council's precept for 2023-24.

18. WARD GRANTS

The Chair accepted the consideration of two ward grant applications as an emergency item on the agenda.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to authorise a payment of £100 to The Food Cupboard, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Abertillery as nominated by Rob Phillips.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to authorise a payment of £200 to the Abertillery Rock and Blues Festival as nominated by Nick Simmons.

The meeting ended at 7.46 pm.