

PlaCE Committee – budget proposals 2023-24

Project	Budget 2022-23	Forecast expenditure 2022-23	Budget proposals 2023-24	Commentary
Town in Bloom	£12,000	£12,000	£14,450	The draft budget proposals include provision for a rate of inflation increase to the cost of employing the project's contractor plus a contingency of nearly £1,500 to cover the costs of theft and vandalism as well as maintenance during the winter months outside the main Town in Bloom contract.
Town in Bloom community involvement	£2,500	£2,500	£3,550	The draft budget proposals include increased support for local community groups and individuals to adopt and maintain floral displays. If this initiative's success continues, it is envisaged that this form of funding will eventually replace much of the central Town in Bloom contract
Shop Local events and activities	£3,000	£250	£0	The budget for 2022-23 included ambitious plans for the Council to organise a number of stand-alone events and activities in Abertillery town centre. None of these events were progressed. The Committee proposes to support existing town centre events in 2023-24 rather than staging its own events and activities.
Halloween event	£5,000	£538	£0	
Car boot sales and Community Council town centre events	£10,000	£0	£0	
Community Council activities at town centre events	£2,000	£800	£3,000	
Grant funding to Ffrindiau Tyleri for town centre events	£2,000	£2,000	£2,500	
Allotments	£600	£583	£650	The draft budget proposal takes account of increased lease fees for 2023-24.
Provision of two new community defibrillators	£4,000	£4,000	£4,000	The Council's Defibrillator Policy envisages the installation of two new defibrillators per year for the next four years.
Maintenance of community defibrillators	£2,000	£984	£3,500	Ten defibrillators will require replacement batteries in 2023-24. The warranty on ten defibrillator cabinets will expire in 2023-24. The draft budget proposal includes provision to purchase a replacement cabinet to act as a stand-by in case an existing cabinet malfunctions.
Environmental projects			£10,000	Following the Council's decision to adopt a Community Asset Transfer Policy, the draft budget proposals include provision for the potential greening of small pieces of land, expenditure on and grant funding for other potential environmental improvements and the procurement of a feasibility study into the potential community asset transfer of a mosaic mural in Abertillery.
Community transport			£8,500	The Committee proposes to procure a professional feasibility study into options for a community transport scheme to link unserved communities with the current public transport system and to provide a service after 5pm across the whole ALCC area.
Total	£43,100	£22,000- £26,000	£50,150	

People and Communities Committee – budget proposals 2023-24

Project	Budget 2022-23	Forecast expenditure 2022-23	Budget proposals 2023-24	Commentary
Christmas lights central contract	£30,000	£14,400	£40,000	The Committee will put a new contract out to tender from 2023 onwards which envisages a much-improved and expanded display. The Council has received informal estimates of around £40,000 from two contractors, although actual expenditure may be significantly reduced by competitive tendering.
Christmas lights overhaul and maintenance			£20,000	The Council has received professional advice that the whole electrical and catenary wire infrastructure requires a complete overhaul and repair. Actual expenditure may be significantly reduced once the required work has been fully scoped and subjected to competitive tendering – but the Council has been advised to make provision for a worst-case scenario.
Llanhilleth TRA Christmas lights	£3,000	£3,000	£3,000	Six local community organisations now receive grant funding to arrange their own Christmas lights displays outwith the Council's central Christmas lights contract.
Brynithel Community Centre Christmas lights	£1,500	£1,500	£1,500	
Swffryd Community Centre Christmas lights	£1,500	£1,500	£1,500	
Bournville Community Centre Christmas lights	£1,500	£1,500	£1,500	
Aberbeeg TRA Christmas lights		£1,500	£1,500	
Pentre Tyleri Christmas lights		£1,500	£1,500	
Christmas lights electricity costs	£1,800	£732	£1,800	The forecast expenditure for 2022-23 takes account of the Electricity Price Guarantee. Without the EPG (which is due to end in April 2023) the same amount of electricity would be forecast to cost nearly £1,700 by Christmas 2023.
Events and initiatives connected with Remembrance Sunday including wreath laying, support for the Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal and the organisation and marshalling of parades	£2,500	£275	£3,000	Blaenau Gwent Council agreed to organise Remembrance Sunday signage and road closures again in 2022. If ALCC takes over these responsibilities in 2023, the forecast cost would be around £2,850.
Development of the Abertillery War Memorial site	£5,000	£2,590	£0	No further development of the infrastructure of the War Memorial site is envisaged in 2023-24.
Maintenance of war memorial sites	£1,500	£2,000	£2,500	The 2022 heatwave meant that actual expenditure in 2022-23 is expected to be £500 more than the original £1,500 budget. After taking account of inflation, similar weather would lead to forecast expenditure of around £2,500 in 2023-24.
Loneliness Project	£5,000		£5,000	The first meeting of this project's partners and stakeholders did not take place until the end of September 2022, so expenditure in 2022-23 has been impossible to forecast. That initial meeting identified seven separate projects that could benefit from grant

				funding or other financial support and several other community groups have since indicated an interest in being involved in the project. The draft budget amount for 2023-24 would enable the Committee to make twenty-or-more small grants or payments in support of activities for otherwise social-excluded members of the community.
Community Council website project	£10,000		£0	Proposals will be brought to Council that this project is taken over by the Community Empowerment Committee.
Community Fun Run	£5,000		£5,000	A fully-costed proposal has been presented to establish a local community fun run based in Soffryd organised with the help of Islwyn Running Club. It is planned that the inaugural event will be staged in the summer of 2023.
Community summer cinema events	£10,021	£0	£10,000	The Committee plans to organise two cinema events for children each week for six weeks at The Met during the 2023 summer school holidays. The actual events have been costed at £4,500 but the proposed budget includes significant provision for transport, the costs of which may be reduced by competitive tendering.
Party in the Park	£15,000	£15,150	£20,000	The Committee plans to expand the current event to include more participative activities for children and a greater diversity of acts for the main stage, booked through a community-based events organiser. The draft budget proposal also includes provision for greater advertising to increase participation from families beyond Abertillery town.
Musical concerts	£500	£1,000	£1,000	Until this year, a local community carol concert and a St David's Day concert have been hosted for free at St Michael's church. It remains uncertain as to when (or if) St Michael's will be able to host the events again, so the draft budget proposal includes provision for the hire of an alternative venue.
Grant funding to Abertillery Rock and Blues Festival	£2,000	£2,000	£2,000	
Total	£95,821	£50,000- £60,000	£120,800	

Community Empowerment Committee – budget proposals 2023-24

	Budget 2021-22	Budget 2022-23	Budget proposals 2023-24	Commentary
Blaenau Gwent detached team	£54,000	£35,000	£54,500	18-hour part-time post to become 37-hour full-time post
Off the Streets initiative	£40,000	£44,000	£44,244	Staffing levels to remain unchanged from 2022-23
Youth-led projects			£2,000	Additional funding to provide experiences and opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable to many of the young people such as educational visits, fact-finding visits and the establishment of a local youth forum.
Total	£94,000	£79,000	£100,744	

The Council currently funds three part-time youth workers on the Blaenau Gwent detached team – 2 x 9 hours and 1 x 18 hours.

A budget proposal to increase funding to support 2 x 9 hours and 1 x 37 hours was approved by Council in January 2021, but provision actually *decreased* in 2021-22 because of Covid restrictions.

The budget proposal for 2023-24 is for the Council to fund the level of provision that it had intended to fund from 2021-22 onwards.

Responsible Financial Officer - budget proposals 2023-24

	Budget 2022-23	Forecast 2022-23	Budget proposal 2023-24	Commentary
Salary costs (including National Insurance and pension)				
Clerk NJC Spine Point 34/35 (25 Hours per week)			£38,119.00	Includes 3% estimated salary increase 2023-24
Deputy Clerk NJC Spine Point 23 (23 Hours per week)			£25,879.00	Includes 3% estimated salary increase 2023-24
Total	£54,453.00	£69,817.00	£63,998.00	2022-23 forecast incl. 3 x backdated pay increases
Training and subscriptions				
Two memberships of Society of Local Council Clerks	£400.00	£360.00	£449.00	
Training budget for officers	£500.00	£528.00	£500.00	Forecast includes Chapter 8 training x 2
Training budget for members	£2,000.00	£4,687.00	£1,000.00	Forecast includes Chapter 8 training x 6 & Member Training Plan
Total	£2,900.00	£5,575.00	£1,949.00	
Administration				
Upgrade of IT equipment	£0.00	£279.00	£0.00	
IT equipment for councillors	£13,900.00	£2,195.00	£0.00	Forecast includes laptops for paperless meetings
IT support	£0.00	£114.00	£200.00	
Zoom	£175.00	£120.00	£120.00	
Vimeo - video hosting site	£70.00	£290.00	£290.00	
Rialtas accounting system	£710.00	£861.00	£1,000.00	
Bank charges	£400.00	£321.00	£400.00	
Insurance	£800.00	£1,246.67	£1,300.00	Forecast includes increase for War Memorial & Town in Bloom
Professional fees	£10,000.00	£3,240.00	£0.00	Forecast includes estimated £1,500 for Tomlin Order
One Voice Wales membership			£2,600.00	Includes estimated 15% increase on 2022-23 subscription rates
Printing and photocopying usage	£700.00	£605.00	£700.00	
Internet and phone (BT)	£500.00	£367.00	£550.00	Transfer to fibre broadband in 2023-24
Web hosting - Vision ICT	£250.00	£250.00	£285.00	
Stationery and postage	£750.00	£651.00	£740.00	
Accountants	£600.00	£0.00	£0.00	
Information Commissioner	£50.00	£35.00	£35.00	
Internal audit	£1,000.00	£1,000.00	£1,200.00	
Travel and mileage	£250.00	£138.00	£250.00	

External Audit (Audit Wales)	£1,000.00	£1,000.00	£1,200.00	
Welsh Water (factory unit)	£155.00	£106.00	£180.00	
Marketing and Publicity (Well-being, leaflets)	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	
Elections costs	£5,000.00	£0.00	£0.00	
Other		£244.00	£250.00	
Total	£36,210.00	£15,866.00	£11,300.00	
Grants and Members Allowances				
Council Grants	£10,000.00	£6,250.00	£17,000.00	£7,000 + 2 x £5,000
£200 per Member - Ward Grants	£3,800.00	£3,800.00	£3,800.00	
Chairman's Allowance (IRP Determination 49)	£1,500.00	£0.00	£1,500.00	Mandatory
Deputy Chair's Allowance (IRP Determination 50)	£500.00	£0.00	£500.00	Mandatory
Specific Responsibilities Allowance (IRP Determination 43) 5 * £500	£2,500.00	£0.00	£2,500.00	Mandatory
Members Allowance (19*£150)	£2,850.00	£650.00	£2,850.00	Mandatory
Attendance Allowance £30 per member per meeting	£11,400.00	£0.00	£12,060.00	Mandatory
Total	£32,550.00	£10,700.00	£40,210.00	
Total	£126,113.00	£101,958.00	£117,457.00	
Discretionary budget	£47,910		£34,049	Excludes salary costs and mandatory budget lines

Overall budget proposals 2023-24

	Budget 2022-23	Budget proposals 2023-24
PlaCE Committee	£43,100	£50,150
People and Communities Committee	£95,821	£120,800
Community Empowerment Committee	£79,000	£100,744
Responsible Financial Officer	£126,113	£117,457
Total	£344,044	£389,151

Budget scrutiny report 2023-24 – Finance and Grants Committee

The Council adopted a formal process of scrutiny of all budget proposals for 2023-24. All budget-holders were required to present their draft proposals to the Finance and Grants Committee, which went through each draft proposed budget for 2023-24 line-by-line. Budget-holders were then asked to reconsider their proposals or to provide more accurate costings before the final proposed budgets were submitted for further scrutiny by the Finance and Grants Committee.

The Finance and Grants Committee is responsible for assessing whether budget lines have been appropriately and reasonably costed. The Committee is not responsible for deciding whether the Council should support an individual project – that is a decision for the Full Council.

People and Communities Committee budget proposals 2023-24

The Council has traditionally been responsible for Christmas lights displays in a number of local communities but, in recent years, several local communities have opted to arrange their own Christmas lights displays with the support of grant funding from the Council rather than being included in the Christmas lights central contract. A working group of the People and Places Committee has drawn up proposals for a significantly improved Christmas lights display in Abertillery town centre. The Finance and Grants Committee recommended that indicative quotes be sought. Two contractors have provided outline quotes: one gave a price range of £25,000-£45,000; the other gave an indicative price of £40,000 per year.

The Finance and Grants Committee accepted that the proposals for a significantly improved Christmas lights display in Abertillery town centre had been reasonably costed but questioned whether the People and Places Committee had successfully evidenced a need to improve the Christmas lights display in Abertillery town centre to such an extent. The Finance and Grants Committee noted that expenditure on the Christmas lights central contract has averaged around £15,000 for the last three years and questioned whether tying the Council into a £40,000-a-year contract would be sustainable.

In addition, potential contractors have highlighted the need to overhaul much of the Christmas lights infrastructure in Abertillery town centre. They have advised the Council to make provision for a worst-case scenario of a complete replacement of wiring, switches and catenary wires at a cost of up to £20,000.

The Finance and Grants Committee appreciated that, as the Loneliness Project had only recently held its initial meeting, forecasting expenditure for 2023-24 was difficult. They considered the proposed budget of £5,000 to be a reasonable estimate.

The Finance and Grants 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.

This budget line was subsequently withdrawn pending proposals for the project to be transferred to the Community Empowerment Committee.

The Finance and Grants Committee noted that provision for a community fun run has been included in successive Council budgets without such an event ever being staged. However, they appreciated that detailed talks have been held with a local running club around proposals for an event to be staged in Soffryd in 2023 and that accurate costings have been prepared.

The People and Places Committee's 'Community summer cinema events' budget line has remained unspent in 2022-23 after the Council failed to secure suitable venues for outdoor screenings. The People and Places Committee has proposed replacement plans for twice-weekly film showings for children from local communities during the 2023 summer holidays. At

the request of the Finance and Grants Committee, the People and Places Committee has confirmed the availability and cost of a venue (The Met) and has provided outline costings for transport to bring children in from across the community council area.

The proposed Party in the Park budget line reflects plans to expand the event to include more participative activities for children, an improved roster of stage performers and increased advertising to encourage attendance from families outside Abertillery town.

The Finance and Grants Committee noted that the Council has no accurate assessment of how many people have attended this event in previous years.

PlaCE Committee budget proposals 2023-24

The PlaCE Committee's Town in Bloom Working Group has 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 took off in late summer and the increased budget line reflects the working group's confidence in wider interest from local community groups in 2023-24.

The PlaCE Committee has 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 new 'Environmental projects' budget line reflects the projected costs of hiring or purchasing items such as brush-cutting and safety equipment. A significant amount has been included in this budget line for a feasibility study into restoring the mosaic mural at the pedestrian subway under the A467 in Abertillery. The PlaCE Committee has had positive support from officers of Blaenau Gwent Council and representatives of the Ebbw Fach Trail Group along with promises to work with the Council to recruit volunteers to take part in proposed environmental projects.

The PlaCE Committee added an extra budget line of £8,500 to its proposals in order to fund a feasibility study into a local community transport scheme in response to the Welsh Government's National Transport Delivery Plan. The Finance and Grants Committee heard that this proposed budget line was in keeping with the costs of similar feasibility studies undertaken around the UK.

Community Empowerment Committee budget proposals 2023-24

The Community Empowerment Committee presented a detailed appraisal and costings of Council-funded youth work.

The Finance and Grants Committee praised the work of the Community Empowerment Committee in improving 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.

Responsible Financial Officer budget proposals 2023-24

As the Council's Responsible Financial Officer, the Clerk is responsible for a number of budget lines that have not been delegated to individual committees.

Officers' salaries are set according to the NJC national pay scale. Pay claims from three previous years had been settled in 2022-23 and the national pay scales will, therefore, 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 has been approximately £7,000. The Clerk has proposed that the Council budgets for expenditure of

£7,000 on smaller Council Grants in 2023-24 but changes its grant criteria and sets aside a further £10,000 to enable it to accommodate grant applications of between £1,000 and £5,000 for which the Council currently has no provision.

The Council is not a member of the representative body One Voice Wales. No decision on future membership has been made but the Clerk has made provision for fees should the Council reconsider membership in 2023-24.

The Clerk reminded the Finance and Grants 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.

Summary

The Finance and Grants Committee has scrutinised the proposals submitted by budget-holders line-by-line and is confident that each individual budget line has been costed satisfactorily.

The total of the budget proposals is £389,151. As noted above, some items must be included in the budget even though past history suggests that they will not be spent. Some other budget proposals include a contingency that the Council hopes not to require. Consequently, actual expenditure in 2023-24 is expected to be less than the total budget.

Nevertheless, the Committee questioned whether the Council could plausibly expect to achieve its planned expenditure in 2023-24. The Committee noted that the Council underspent its budget in 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-22 and is forecast to significantly underspend its budget again in 2022-23. The Committee was, therefore, dismayed that the total budget proposals for 2023-24 were 13 percent higher than the budget proposals for 2022-23 (£344,034) and 80 percent more than its forecast expenditure for 2022-23 (around £215,000).

The Committee noted that the repeated underspends are currently forecast to leave the Council holding around £85,000 more public money at the end of the financial year 2022-23 than it requires in order to safeguard the smooth running of the Council. The Committee was of the opinion that the Council should plan to reduce the excess public money it holds during 2023-24 by setting a precept significantly below its budget.

The Finance and Grants Committee recommended to the Full Council that it should set a precept for 2023-24 no higher than that of 2022-23 (£289,000).