

Finance Governance and Personnel Committee Special Meeting

Wednesday 18th December 2019

Present: Cllrs David Owens (Chair), Linda Edwards, Peter Freeman, John Hedley Jones, Hugh Shepardson and Bob Walpole

Officers: Huw Thomas (RFO), Louise Robinson (CDO) and Ed Davies (Administrative Assistant – minute taker)

(Upstairs room, Burry Port Institute 10.00am – 11.20am)

1. To receive apologies for absence

None.

2. To receive members' declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

Due to the CDO having another meeting to attend to, agenda item 4 was heard first.

4. Consideration of a Community Hub

The CDO gave a brief presentation on the concept of a Community Hub, highlighting the demand for such a facility that had arisen from the work of the Community Forums and via the public in general. The potential functions of such a building were made note of, including use as an access point for information, a collection point for resources such as recycling bags and compost bags, a casual meeting place to support community organisations and charitable events and/or to provide a safe meeting place for young people in the town during evenings.

The CDO stated that the intention would be to find a publicly visible building in which to host the Hub and to seek funding to cover the running costs including staff. She stated that a number of funding sources had been identified and that she was confident that sufficient funding could be secured to make it a neutral cost project to the Council. Particular attention was paid to the elements of providing the young people in the community with a safe place to hang out on an evening, as the largest identified source of funding would be to tackle this issue, namely a National Lottery fund to cover a three-year long project.

Members requested that a copy of the presentation document and proposal to be provided to all Councillors following the meeting.

ACTION: Assist. Clerk

The CDO reported that a potential building had been identified which was ideally located and which provided sufficient space for the initial phases, although it was noted that it may prove too small if demand exceeded expectations or grew quickly. The location and identity of the building were made known to members. Initial conversations had been had with the owner to establish what

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terms a lease could be agreed on, which were for a standard commercial rate, but would be on a rolling monthly contract, as it was understood that longer term occupancy was determined by the success or not of securing the funding bids, there would therefore be no penalties for ending the tenancy during the first year, provided the Council met its obligations to the month end. The owner had also agreed to provide whatever furnishing was required at no extra cost, but had made one stipulation which was for the Council to agree to take on the tenancy from February 1st 2020, as he would otherwise be putting the building on the market for lease from that date.

The RFO advised members that the Regeneration and Community Engagement Committee had already agreed in principle to support the idea of creating a Community Hub, but that it was beyond their remit to commit to the tenancy of the building, as that was for the Town Council alone. It was highlighted that the Council was unlikely to secure the funding prior to February 1st 2020, and so the Regeneration and Community Engagement Committee had referred to this Committee to decide whether or not to approve the request to provide financial cover from the General Reserves for the rental costs until such a time that the funding was secured. He clarified that this Committee's decision and recommendation to the Town Council Ordinary Meeting would affect the nature of the decision required, hence the need for a special meeting of this Committee.

Members discussed at length the matters at hand and sought clarification on a number of issues. They noted that the expected time it would take for a successful funding application bid was between 3 and 6 months and that the approximate total rental costs for the year were between £10000 and £12000. Asked on her confidence at securing the funding, the CDO stated that having spoken to contacts, the Council had a very good chance with each bid, due to the identified community need being met, particularly so in relation to the provision of a safe place for young people to meet.

Other matters raised included questions on how the hub would be run with concern that current staff were not sufficiently trained to be information points to the public; that the Council was already committing to a large programme of works and activities without the full resources in place, which could badly affect the precept increase and that there was insufficient time to give this matter the full attention it deserved prior to making a decision.

The CDO left the meeting at 10.40am

Members agreed to defer their decision on the matter until they had heard the update from the RFO on the proposed 2020/21 budget.

3. Update on the 2020/21 budget

The RFO distributed copies of a document which gave the information of historic precepts and relative increases, as well as the initial proposed precept for 2020-21, an increase of 28.4% and for two other options, one an increase of 17.8% and the other 14%. The document also showed the total savings from the initial proposed budget that would be required for the two options.

Members were told that option 1 had been drawn up as requested which indicated a saving of £48,440 would need to be made from original budget proposals. Option 2 had been drawn up based on the RFO's advice, as it was the same percentage increase as the previous year, and that he understood that any increase over 15% to the precept would require greater justification to the Auditor General. It was noted that option 2 would necessitate the Committees making a combined total savings of £65,591 to their combined initial budgets.

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Members discussed the issues and noted that each Committee was responsible for finding the savings to reach the target recommended by this Committee. Members were agreed that it would be a difficult task for each Committee but recognised the significance and implications of too large a precept increase by the Town Council on the public in light of an expected large increase by Carmarthenshire County Council.

Following their discussion and in recognition of the pressure that too large an increase would have on household budgets, the RFO was asked to add a 3rd option of a 10% increase to the document, and for it to be referred to each committee, with the advice to aim for a 10-14% precept increase with the RFO to advise each Committee accordingly.

ACTION: RFO

The RFO highlighted a few areas where he believed savings could be made by the Committees, noting that this Committee could look at refining its salaries budget. He also stated that as he needed the finalised proposed budget for January 15th, he would be arranging a special meeting for each Committee to do that during early January.

4. Consideration of a Community Hub

In returning to this item, members discussed the issue and noted that it was not their responsibility to arrange how the Hub should be run, and that any concerns they had on that matter should be referred to the Regeneration and Community Engagement Committee; and that they should instead focus on whether or not to approve the request to underwrite the rental costs for the building until sufficient funding was secured.

Cllr Hugh Shepardson **PROPOSED** that the Committee refer the matter to the Town Council with the recommendation that the Council commit to underwriting the costs of rental of the building for up to 6 months from the general reserves while funding was being sought, seconded by Cllr Peter Freeman

In the ensuing vote members **RESOLVED** unanimously to the proposal.

ACTION: Acting Clerk and RFO

Chair 

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