



Cyngor Tref Rhydaman Ammanford Town Council

Minutes of Finance Committee Meeting of Ammanford Town Council (ATC) on Wednesday 24th February 2021 Via Virtual Media on MS Teams

Attendees: Members of Finance Committee: Councillor Stephen Davies (SD) (Chairperson of Committee); Mayor Julia Bell (JB); Deputy Mayor Gruff Harrison (GH); Councillor Deian Harries (DH); Councillor Rhodri Jones (RJ); Councillor Helen Rees (HR); Councillor Stephen Roberts (SR)
Attendees: Non-Members of Finance Committee: Councillor Stefan Butler (SB); Councillor Llio Davies (LD); Councillor Rhys Fisher (RF); Councillor Gwenllian Harries (GH1); Councillor Emyr John (EJ); Councillor Geraint Jones (GJ)

Minutes taken by: Clerk Duncan Morgan (DSM)

Councillor Stephen Davies Presiding

Meeting commenced at 18:07

1) Apologies and reasons for absence

None

2) Declarations of interest

Councillor Stephen Davies – Ammanford AFC
Councillor Rhys Fisher – Ammanford AFC
Councillor Deian Harries – County Councillor & Ammanford AFC
Deputy Mayor Gruff Harrison – Ammanford AFC
Councillor Emyr John – Ammanford Foodbank
Councillor Rhodri Jones – Ammanford AFC
Stephen Roberts – Ammanford AFC

3) Review expenditure for 2020/2021 Financial Year to date

SD – Stated that it had been extraordinarily difficult to collate the information. Undertaking the task remotely compounded the difficulty. ATC uses the Rialtas Software which is not the best or most flexible to use.

The current administration and management has taken a far more frugal approach to expenditure. This mindset is to be commended.

Given the difficulties many have faced this year it would be great if we could find opportunities to mitigate cost so we can hopefully prevent increasing the precept.

This budget should also take into consideration the future of ATC and allows for future investment into our facilities.

ATC needs to develop a roadmap to take into consideration when a relaxation of the current restrictions take place and produce a document to enhance further development with a view to plan the future key areas of the Town under the council's jurisdiction.

SD then continued with the presentation of the review of the Year to Date 2020/21 budget expenditure information.

EJ – Then commented that no financial updates had been received by Councillors during the past year despite him asking and ATC needs to hold more Finance Committee meetings. He also understood that the accounts for 19/20 had not yet been signed off (again despite chasing for updates) and that the draft budget should have been published alongside the Agenda for members of the public to review. The spreadsheet had also been issued to Councillors as a password protected sheet and the password had been denied. This would have allowed easier interrogation in lieu of proposals. Leaving the budget setting to this late in the day (Standing Orders require initial proposals by December) does not leave any period for public consultation.

SD – Replied yes agree, COVID restrictions, particularly at the start of the fiscal year, have hampered the ability for regular concise data, going forward a coding restructuring exercise with Rialtas will facilitate this.

EJ – As not Finance Committee member, asked if he raised queries in tonight's or tomorrow's meeting.

SD – Responded that queries could be raised at either meeting. He continued by asking if the budget sheet could be seen on screen.

SD – Presented his report of the expenditure review for the 2020/2021 fiscal year to date. The total first draft expenditure was estimated to be a projected figure of £219,219, compared with £296,438 for 2019/20.

There was also a carry over from the previous year due to CCC bill of £36k being paid in current fiscal year. So effectively a reduction in spend £149,219.

SD then went through report in more detail.

Asset Management – The figure of £43,926 was lumped together for all CCC DLO expenditure and ATC were awaiting a more detailed breakdown from CCC. SD stated that in the next Fiscal Year it is hoped that a more detailed expenditure coding system will be introduced to enable a better split of this budget spend.

SD proceeded to report on each individual item on the Assets Management budget.

EJ – At this point EJ commented that the expenditure on parks to be £101K whereas SLA with CCC was £60,000

SD – Replied that this was for 2 Financial Years as the CCC bills received within the same Financial Year, all costs had for Green areas are included.

Events – the expenditure for this year was £16,303 which was less than the projected budget due to COVID restrictions.

EJ – Queried what events had taken place

SD – Confirmed that majority was Christmas lights but ATC had held online events

Administration

SD – Continued that COVID had also had an impact on the Administration budget for example ATC had not paid its monthly lease to CCC as the Mayor Parlour was unoccupied.

EJ – Asked if he could raise a query regarding the amount paid so far in redress payments and whether the inclusion of the budget for such payments going forward was sufficient as officially he was not aware of any likely payments needed?

SD – Replied that payments had been included for by prudent accounting.

EJ – Asked what payments had been made and what further grants were to be awarded before the end of the financial year.

SD – Replied by stating that money had been provided to Ammanford Food Bank and Dawnsyr Penrhyd. Suggested that we pay a further £1,000 pounds to Ammanford foodbank. This was agreed by members.

SD – Then presented the Review of expenditure for the Financial Year 2020/2021 to date for consideration by the Finance Committee.

EJ - Sought confirmation that the figures showed a £50,000 shortfall in actual predicted expenditure over budget allocations and this was therefore surplus

SD - Confirmed this.

It was proposed and resolved to accept the Review of the Expenditure for the 2020/2021 to date.

Proposed – RJ

Seconded – SR

All Members of the Finance Committee were in agreement.

4. Work through the forecast for 2021/2022

SD – Ran through the forecast for 2021/2022

EJ – Asked if what was to be undertaken in Capital Investment Provision

SD – Replied that an investment of £40K had been allowed for and that the Parks are currently tired, so we need to start making a provision. It is proposed to undertake work in the parks in Ammanford which could include upgrading of the equipment, also the skateboard Park needs attention.

SD – Continued to discuss each budget in detail. He stated that the budget forecast for the events had been based on historical data as the only significant expenditure in the current financial year was Christmas Lights. SD then continued with the Administration Budget and added that the Personnel Budget forecast had been set for an investment in the future for additional staff/employees for ATC during the 2021/22 fiscal year, as advised by One Voice Wales last year. He continued to discuss each item in turn as follows:-

Insurance – fixed amount

Accounting Software £124 but only one bill received, more anticipated.

Legal fees – No bills received, but work undertaken.

Accountancy – Similar to previous years.

Members Allowances - It is noted that Members have kindly agreed to forgo their allowances for 2021/2022, in order to reduce impact on precept support the investment provision for asset development fund – It is also noted that current members have not taken allowances for previous years.

Members Training – Planned to increase training for 2021/22 fiscal year

Staff Recruitment – Further spend on 2021/22 fiscal year based on One Voice Wales assessment.

Staff Training – Based on previous budget.

Telephone & Broadband – Same cost as last year.

All other administration items were budgeted for based on historical trends.

Asset Management Budget

Ammanford Park

CCC DLO Fixed amounts as submitted by CCC but include a 2% increase

Splash Pad – Not used this year due to COVID. Budget based on previous years when operational.

Flowerbeds – Actual Costs for seasonal planting.

Ammanford & Pantyfynnon Recreational Ground and other parks – Based on CCC DLO SLA Costs.

Playgrounds – Proposed allocation of investment fund to be considered in future.

Toilets – Cleaning and Maintenance also received old bill for CCC for previous cleaning. Budget for next year based on historic spend.

Hanging Baskets – It is proposed to have hanging baskets in the Town Centre, along Wind Street leading down past Wilkinsons, College Street along the same design as Pontardulais.

COVID Transformation Grant – Currently there are no indicators that this grant will be available next year.

EJ – Asked for further information regarding CCC DLO costs and top dressing included.

SD – Replied by stating that the CCC DLO had submitted up to date figures. SD confirmed that top dressing for all playing fields were included in the SLA.

EJ – Commented that a generic Asset Investment Provision was not the way to do it but actual projects should be identified and indicative budget requirements then factored into precept requirement.

SD – Replied that he had spoken with Llandybie Community Council and that's how they did it. SD continued by stating that we are aware of some areas of investment, including A' Ford Park surfaces, and equipment and the skateboard park in particular.

EJ – Stated you cannot take money off the public in the hope of spending it that year without a plan in place and did not like the label of Asset Management Provision. Querying if it was legal.

SD – Replied that Asset Management Provision was the way forward, or our parks/assets will not be developed.

GJ – Agreed with SD that Asset Investment Provision wording/title was good labelling and as chair of the Asset Management Committee it was a great idea.

JB & LD – Agreed with the title of Asset Management Provision.

GJ – Stated that it made good business sense.

SD – Suggested that a central account be set up and that separate account codes be set up on the Financial Accounting system.

The outlined summary of this provision would be as follows, but flexibility around distribution would be considered as merited, but this money is only to be spent on infrastructure.

A' ford Park £15,000, Rec(Skateboard Park £10,000), other parks £10,000, Toilets £5,000.

SD then proceeded to summarise the forecasted expenditure of each budget category i.e. Administration, Asset Management, Events.

Events Budget

SD – Stated that this year's spend was £16,303. The budget figure would be based on previous year's budget. The current year's spend was for Christmas Lights, Remembrance Sunday and Virtual Talent Competitions.

SD added that next year should current restrictions be lifted ATC could run an Outdoor Cinema event, combine the Big Day Out and Twrch Trwyth into one event.

LD – Added there are difficulties facing ATC and we are unsure of what is going to happen in the future. The Twrch Trwyth event is an unique event and the one event could be based on this theme.

SD – Suggested that ATC could try and combine both the Big Day Out and Twrch Trwyth.

JB – Commented that this might be the way forward.

LD – Added If we have to have one event this could be the way forward.

SD – Stated before we run any event ATC would have to put an agreement together with the organisers. SD Added that taking one event out could produce a saving of £8,500

DH – Added let's be positive that an event will be run in September.

SD – Stated that he would make provision in next Financial Year's budget for outdoor event such as Big Day Out, Twrch Trwyth.

Personnel Budget

SD – Stated that ATC needs to plan in terms of additional staff in terms of Asset Management discipline and Administrative Support.

RJ – Commented that this has been discussed previously and was the way forward. A ‘no brainer’.

SD – Added that he allowed for the two additional members of staff to be recruited and employed.

EJ – Stated that he did not believe ATC had officially decided to recruit new members of staff and there was an option of employing a consultant to undertake the immediate role of the Facilities Officer. Also queried why we had not allowed for translation of documents for the website. A debate between the members ensued. The outcome of which was that DSM would contact OVW regarding the relevant legislation governing ATC’s website regarding bi-lingual compliance.

It was suggested that an allowance of £2,500 be allocated in the budget to engage the services of an outside translation service.

Savings on Asset Management Budget

SD – Presented some further savings suggested by EJ.

SD – Discussed savings that could be made on Asset Management Budget by reducing grass cutting occasions from 20 to 16 times.

Reduction in litter collection could also be made.

GJ – Commented with reference to litter collection that the bins would not be overflowing.

SD – Responded that he had liaised with CCC and they stated that it would work but they would monitor the situation.

EJ – Suggested that ATC could purchase more or larger bins as SLA not based on actual number of bins by number of visits to that site

EJ – Suggested that ATC could use a private contractor to undertake playground inspections as this could be better value.

SD – Stated that ATC should ‘hold fire’ as Llandybie Community Council were going through the tender process for grounds maintenance to include park maintenance and ATC should await the outcome of this exercise.

EJ - Also queried the income side of the budget in relation to reimbursement of cost incurred by ATC in previous financial years and recoupment of this from the various sports clubs

GJ – Suggested that in terms of the Recreation grounds could the clubs make a 50% contribution for the grounds that are in public use, given that the top pitches are in use by the public and the clubs.

EJ – Stated that the clubs.....(mic muted)... are in discussion

SD – Stated that he was not aware of any conversations between the clubs

LD – Left the meeting at 19:55

A debate ensued between the members regarding the contribution of the clubs and the outcome was that SD would put some figures together.

At 19:58 the Clerk stated that as the meeting was now approaching 2 hour point, according to Standing Orders a vote has to be taken for the meeting to continue. The members agreed that the meeting should continue.

SD – Continued to discuss further savings that could be made and stated that after consulting with our Insurance Company playground inspections by CCC could be reduced from weekly to fortnightly inspection. This could result in saving of £8,712 per annual but these savings would have to be confirmed. The new Facilities Officer could conduct visual inspections on alternate weeks.

EJ - Queried VAT refunds and why not included in figures

SD - Said this was not normal practice

EJ - Queried grant for Park Avenue lighting project and why not included in budget as it would need a financial contribution from ATC towards the costs

SD - Would look to include this

5. Agree and set budget for 2021/22 Financial Year

SD – Presented the adjusted budget figure of £277,560 expenditure and £17,850 revenue (income) to be set for 2021/2022 fiscal year.

A motion was proposed that the 2021/2022 Financial Year budget be set at £277,560.

Proposed – DH

Seconded – SR

Agreed by all members of the Finance Committee

6. Discuss, Set the Precept for 2021/2022 Financial Year

EJ - Asked for clarification that circa £113,000 was now in Council reserves.

DSM - Confirmed the above as reserves balance at the time of the meeting.

Based on the information provided SD stated that the precept could be set at £259,710 for the 2021/2022 fiscal year

Proposed – RJ

Seconded – JB

Agreed by all members of the Finance Committee

Meeting Closed at 20:28

Signed: (Chair)

Print Name:

Date: