



FARNHAM TOWN COUNCIL

A

Notes Strategy & Resources

Time and date

9.30 am on Tuesday 17th October, 2023

Place

Council Chamber - Farnham Town Hall

Strategy & Resources Members Present:

Councillor David Beaman
Councillor Mat Brown
Councillor Alan Earwaker (ex-Officio)
Councillor Andrew Laughton
Councillor Michaela Martin
Councillor Graham White (Lead Member)

Officers:

Iain Lynch (Town Clerk); Iain McCready (Business and Facilities Manager) items 1-5, Jenny de Quervain (Planning & Civic Officer) items 6-10.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllrs Fairclough, Hesse, Merryweather and Mirylees.

2. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes

The Notes of the meeting held on 5th September were agreed as a correct record.

4. Finance Report

- 1 The Town Clerk introduced the six month finance papers at Appendices B to E on the agenda. The Working Group went through the Income and Expenditure in details focussing particularly on the Income and Investments at this meeting. With the income for the second half of the precept having been included, income was running at 95% of the budgeted income although some elements, such as the CIL income was ringfenced.
- 2 In response to a number of questions posed, the Town Clerk advised the following:

- i. Hall and lettings income shown at 41%. This primarily represents income from the Wrecclesham Community Centre and was budgeted for an increase in 2023/24. The review with the Trustees is expected.
- ii. Allotment rents income is shown at 42.3%. Invoices for the year are sent out in October (with half the funds moved into the new financial year in April). There was a large changeover in 2022/23 and income for the year is likely to be closer to £15,750. It was agreed that an increase should be considered for 2024 when Fees and Charges were reviewed.
- iii. Grave purchases income was running at 39.6%. The Working Group noted that this was not a cause for concern at this stage as activity was usually higher in the second half of the year and the difference represent two non-resident purchases.
- iv. Sponsorship Income was currently 40% of budget. The Town Clerk advised, as previously reported, that this had been a more difficult year because of the West Street Closure and trading conditions for some of the regular sponsors. There were new sponsors coming on board for Christmas with the Literary Festival still to come, but the end of year outturn was likely to fall short.
- v. Ticket Sales mostly related to the anticipated income from the Gin & Fizz Festival, which, as separately reported and for several reasons had not resulted in the numbers hoped for. Some ticket income would be generated by the Literary Festival but the total would not make up for the shortfall. A revised expectation would be around 50% of budget.
- vi. Advertising income relates primarily to the Residents' Guide published in January and was expected to hit or exceed target.
- vii. Banners Income relates to external and internal banners across the highway. The latter were down this year but internal banners (eg Farmers' Markets, In Bloom and Events) were recharged at the end of the year, and this code was expected to hit target. The income should balance expenditure (Code 4655) during the year and was expected to do so.

The Town Clerk also advised with rising interest rates, investment interest was already at 186% of annual budget and dividend income from the Local Authority Property Fund was expected to hit or exceed budget.

Councillors reviewed the Money Market accounts and other investments set out in Appendix D, noting the obligation under legislation was primarily to protect the capital and avoid risk. In terms of the CCLA Local Authority Property Fund, the Working Group noted the comparison, done at end of the 2022-23 financial year, showed that the long-term investment (listed on the Asset Register) had still performed better than if the investment had been placed on deposit.

In terms of expenditure, the Working Group noted that whilst the main staffing code was running lower than budget, the cost of agency and contracted staffing was higher than budget and the cost of living increase had not yet been agreed by the National Joint Negotiating Committee. Overall expenditure was running at 46% for the sixth month period.

The Working Group reviewed the outstanding debtors and only one small debt was potentially an issue and was being pursued.

- 3 The Working Group received the External Auditors unqualified audit and audit letter, at Annex I to these Notes, following the completion of the 2022-23 accounts and the Annual Governance and Accountability Return review by PKF Littlejohn LLP and recommended it to Council.

It is recommended that the Unqualified Audit for the 2022-23 Accounts be welcomed.

- 4 The Working Group considered a request for an additional grant for Space2grow towards its parenting classes and in particular towards the Talking Teens parenting class. Exceptionally it was agreed to recommend that this grant be approved and that Space2grow be added to the list of organisations supported with a Service Level Agreement (SLA) recipient and for them to make a presentation as part of the grants process for 2024-25.

It is recommended that:

- i) **a grant of £2,000 be made to the Talking teens parenting classes with the funding to be met from the Younger People's budget; and**
 - ii) **Space2grow be added to the organisations in receipt of a Service Level Agreement grant for the work carried out by them.**
- 5 The Working Group noted that there had been an inspection of the Christmas Lights in situ on 16th October. The lighting scheme was due for tender (the current scheme had been in place since 2014 and failing elements were renewed annually) as the annual cost was now in excess of budget (2022-23 outturn was just under £80,000). It had been noted that many of the LED elements were now dimmed, and some of the connections were obsolete as a new standard had come into effect. The Working Group noted that the new tender would be on the basis of lease or purchase and that any additional investment for replacements this year would need to be separately identified for retention and could be used in other parts of the town. The total costs and options (which included moving some elements around) was awaited, but it was agreed that officers pursue the most practical solution.

5. Contracts & Assets update

- 1 The Business and Facilities Manager drew attention to the position of three potential insurance claims which related to land transferred by Waverley, two of which were considered to be Waverley's responsibility to resolve.
- 2 The Business and Facilities Manager provided an update on the two Lombardy poplar's which had had detailed resistograph tests and were showing to be over mature and failing. It was possible to prolong their lives by some reduction in height and width but their locations meant there could be damage to property if they failed. The Working Group noted that Waverley had had to remove one lombardy poplar in Gostrey before the land was transferred to Farnham Town Council. It was agreed to recommend to Council that, to minimise risk, given that they could fail at any time, the two lombardy poplars be removed.
Recommendation: It is recommended that the remaining lombardy poplar in Gostrey Meadow and the lombardy poplar in Haren Gardens be removed and replacement trees be planted nearby.
- 3 The Business and Facilities Manager provided an update on the replacement fence at Six Bells allotment and advised that a working party of allotment holders had helped prepare the ground. He also advised that the approved contractor (Jacksons) had visited Wrecclesham Community Centre prior to installing the new fence and advised that the end of the fence was tied into a retaining wall and required additional work which, with material increases would increase the costs to nearer £7,000. The Working Group noted this and agreed to recommend the higher costs.
Recommendation: It is recommended that the revised quotation by Jackson's fencing be approved.
- 4 The Business and Facilities Manager provided a verbal update on the progress on other assets matters including progress on the Councillor jackets for events.

6. Farnham Infrastructure Programme

- 1 Cllr Beaman and Jenny de Quervain provided an update on progress on the Farnham Infrastructure Programme. The painting of the 20MPH roundels on the town centre roads had started and the detailed work on the town centre design was progressing.

Surrey CC had submitted its CIL application to WBC and had included an indicative sum for an FTC contribution. The FIP project team had been meeting with stakeholders including the Castle Street Residents' Association. It was noted that the Parking review would be commencing in mid- November and would be considered by Strategy & Resources at its December meeting.

It was noted that the works at Water Lane had been postponed to March because of the other works planned for the town including the works in East Street for the Brightwells scheme which would take place in the new year and scheduled utility works in South Street.

It was noted that topographical assessment were underway on Borelli Walk for the Park and Stride project.

- 2 Following the Brightwell's Board meeting on 13th October, it was noted that Crest were pursuing a new application for a conditions discharge for the previously permitted 2.5 metre bridge. The Working Groups discussed whether or not FTC could submit an application for a 4m bridge using the same documents provided by Crest with a revised drawing to test whether or not the scheme was acceptable, and that such an application could run in parallel with a crest application and could help resolve the impasse if agreement for the additional costs could also be clarified. David Brown had indicated that this may be possible and the matter was being followed up by the Town Clerk. The Working Group also noted that Crest would ideally like the bridge to be removed outside the Practical Completion date but this was a matter for Waverley and Surrey to resolve. It was agreed, subject to the formal response of Crest on the provision of documents, to recommend to Council that FTC submits a planning application for a 4m bridge to connect Borelli Walk to Brightwells. It was noted that discussions with Waverley and Surrey would also need to be held prior to submission.
It is recommended that FTC submits a planning application for a 4m bridge subject to the agreement of, and documentation provided by, Crest Nicholson to resolve the latest requirement and standards for shared pedestrian and cycling bridge.

7. Reports of Task Groups

- 1 Infrastructure Planning Group
 - a) The Working Group noted the timescale and Scope for the Local Plan which had been set out in a report to the Waverley Executive (attached at Appendix H to its agenda). The Planning & Civic Officer reported on a meeting that had taken place between FTC and Waverley officers which amplified some of the programme. A new Call for Sites was scheduled from November to January, and ideally this would be done in collaboration with the Town Council so the methodology and results could be incorporated in the Review of the Neighbourhood Plan. There were some elements that were approached differently (eg windfalls and approach to density per site) and FTC had requested its criteria be replicated within the Waverley Call for Sites to avoid duplication, and was awaiting the Waverley methodology to be sent.

[Cllr Loughton left at this point]

The Working Group noted that the meeting with community groups to discuss the review of the Neighbourhood Plan was scheduled for 23rd November and the first meeting would be to consider the Local Plan timetable and which elements of the Neighbourhood Plan should be prioritised for update.

- b) The Working Group noted the Town and Parishes Planning Forum which would include an update on the Local Plan was taking place in person and by zoom on 1st November.
 - c) The Working Group noted that there was no update on the Judicial Challenge on Waverley Lane, and the Court's decision on whether or not the challenge could progress was awaited.
- 2 Jenny de Quervain advise the Working Group of the recent meeting of the Conservation Areas Advisory Group which had reviewed its terms of reference and clarified how it would operate.

8. Consultations

- 1 Cllr Beaman presented a draft response to the Farnborough Airport Airspace Change proposal at Appendix I to the agenda. There was some discussion on additional points to be included and on an invitation to speak on BBC Radio. The final submitted response is attached at Annex 2 to these Notes.
- 2 The Working Group noted that Waverley Borough Council was undertaking a Polling District and Polling Stations Review. Details had been submitted to all members, and it was agreed that individual councillors should respond.
- 3 The Working Group noted that FTC had been invited by Clive Betts MP to contribute to the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee any examples of local government financial distress. The Working Group agreed that this seemed more relevant to principal authorities and agreed that there no matters FTC wished to raise at this stage.

9. Town Clerk update

The Town clerk provided an update of a number of matters including the claim to the Ombudsman against HSBC; the attendance at the Maltings take Par Fair; letters of support submitted for a number of community organisations seeking CIL and other funding; and an update on three new starters (Megan Cross as Events Assistant, Betsy Pullen as Business Administration Apprentice, and Tom Vaughan as an Outside Workforce Team Member). Interviews had also taken place for the Facilities Assistant and a new starter was expected soon.

10. Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting was agreed as being on either Tuesday 5th December or Wednesday 6th December depending on commitments of Waverley double hatted Executive members. It was agreed that the timing should either be 2pm on Tuesday or 9.30 or 4pm on the Wednesday. Date and time to be confirmed.

The meeting ended at 1.30pm

Notes written by Iain Lynch