

Snodland Town Council – Policy and Finance Minutes

31st October 2024

Committee Members in attendance:	Cllr Mrs V Lawrence-Rose (C), S Loader, Mrs Sue Bell, P Hickmott, A Bennison, D Lettington, G Miners
Non Committee Members in attendance:	
Committee Members Absent with apologies:	Cllr W Mallard, Ms D King (VC),
Committee Members Absent without apologies:	
Council Staff Present:	Mrs K Sowten (CEO) Mrs K Miners
Members of the public:	

1.	<u>Apologies for absence</u> see above.
2.	<u>Declaration of Interests</u> None
3.	<u>Minutes - To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd September 2024</u> The minutes of the meeting held on the 23 rd September 2024 were agreed as a true record. Actions, for .gov emails, our IT is looking into this.
4.	<u>Questions from the Public</u> <i>Pursuant to Standing Order 3 e & g Members of the public may make representation, answer questions and give evidence at a meeting which they are entitled to attend in respect of the business on the agenda. A member of the public shall not speak for more than 3 minutes</i> There were no members of the public present
5.	<u>Audit Trail to be given by a Councillor</u> Cllr Ms King carried out an audit which focused on allotments. (A copy of the report is available on file). Cllr Ms King also carried out some research on other allotments locally comparing prices and noted that some also make additional charges for water. 1333 RESOLVED to review the pricing structure at Amenities and Recreation for the next allotment rent increase due to be announced in 2025 for 2026.
6.	<u>Financial Review</u> <u>6.1 Income and Expenditure Report.</u> A full copy of the report is on file. The following queries were raised <ul style="list-style-type: none"> rent charge for market, The CEO advised that she had been chasing TMBC for revised invoices for the market rent, which was adjusted

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	<p>when the new lease was agreed. These have been outstanding for 7 months and have just been received and entered on the system and paid. The income from the market is low and at breakeven point. This may need to be discussed in the future with a view to trying to attract more stall holders into the market. We have a 5-year lease with TMBC for the market.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expenses for council – This was the retirement gift for site staff. • Income for Devonshire rooms seems quite low – not as many hirers this year. The CEO will look into this and report back. <p><u>6.2 Expenditure under delegated authority</u></p> <p>The CEO gave a report on the spending under delegated authority, a full report is on file.</p> <p><u>6.3 Aged Debtors</u></p> <p>The CEO gave a report on aged debtors. A full copy of the report is available on file. No funds have been received in relation to the CCJ issued, nothing more can be done. If it were to be paid, this would go into reserves.</p> <p>The café currently has an outstanding balance, though the owner is paying current bills. The CEO should arrange a meeting with her to discuss sustainability. The café functions as a community hub, providing support to elderly and vulnerable locals, making it valuable to the community. Observing the café in action is recommended to better understand its impact. Challenges surrounding the dual use of the café with the cricket club.</p> <p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add CCJ to next Policy and Finance agenda to be written off as a bad debt. • Cllr Lawrence to look into funding to support vulnerable people in the community (Café). • Cllr Hickmott to carry out research at the café • Café to be discussed as an agenda item at a future meeting. <p><u>6.4 Earmarked Reserve and Capital Reserve Balances</u></p> <p>A full report is available on file. Funds have been transferred into repairs and renewals.</p> <p>Concerns were raised over the large amount of reserves, the CEO reminded councillors that this is because they are earmarked for specific projects.</p> <p>This will be reviewed as part of the budget process.</p>
7.	<p><u>To receive the Internal Audit report from KCC</u></p> <p>It is worthy of comment that the audit did not identify any issues. The Chairman congratulated the CEO on a job well done.</p>

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8.	<p><u>Kent Community Warden Service Review</u></p> <p>Following a review by Kent County Council (KCC), the community warden service is being reduced, leaving Snodland without a dedicated warden. The new allocation assigns 6 wardens across Maidstone and Tonbridge & Malling, with Snodland receiving no direct coverage despite its high needs.</p> <p>Snodland's former warden, has been reassigned to cover other areas. He was surprised by the reallocation, citing the considerable demand in Snodland, which has many vulnerable residents. The new arrangement has left Snodland and nearby areas underserved.</p> <p>The Community wardens role was extensive, covering welfare checks, referrals, community drop-ins, school engagement, and support for food banks. His involvement was anticipated to support Snodland's upcoming community hub, and his loss creates a significant service gap.</p> <p>Other local councils, such as Headcorn and Harrietsham, have independently employed wardens. Early indications are of a salary around £26,000-£27,000. If sourced from KCC, the cost rises to approximately £47,000. STC could explore options such as cost-sharing with neighbouring areas (Aylesford, Eccles, Burham, and Wouldham) or standalone direct employment.</p> <p>There is concern over the data that informed KCC's reallocation, particularly as Snodland faces high deprivation.</p> <p>STC is committed to finding a sustainable solution to ensure that the town's vulnerable residents receive the support they need, potentially through independent funding if necessary.</p> <p>Actions :</p> <p>The CEO will reach out to neighbouring parishes to discuss potential cost-sharing.</p> <p>Cllr Hickmott will continue discussions with KCC Officer to advocate for Snodland's needs.</p> <p>1334 RESOLVED - A formal information request will be submitted to KCC to understand the criteria used for service distribution.</p> <p>1335 RESOLVED - Asking for a breakdown, under freedom of information request. Asking for raw data that has been used.</p>
9.	<p><u>To receive an update on the Community Hub</u></p> <p>The CEO is still awaiting refurbishment figures from Clarion, who are hopeful that they will have sufficient funding to complete the refurbishment without additional funding needed.</p> <p>Networking meeting relating to the Community Hub being held in November that councillors are aware of Wednesday 13th November at 1300 in MG Suite.</p>
10.	<p><u>To consider plans for Budget 2025/26</u></p>

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	<p>The chairman reported that before a draft budget is presented, it would be beneficial to discuss any potential savings or spending requirements.</p> <p>Items to consider -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional funding for a Community Warden • Reduction in Christmas lights – lights only on lampposts and across the road. None along shop fronts. • Keep Fireworks • Increase budget for Christmas Lantern parade. • Ensure budget available for fencing along Potyns. <p>Reserves</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new ride on mower is required, which would be covered from either vehicle replacement or Potyns 106 reserves. • Truck – A new tail gate and wing mirror is needed. Concerns were raised regarding the condition of the truck and staff should be checking the vehicle on a weekly basis. They should also report any incidents when they happen. The truck also needs to be cleaned on a weekly basis. Without exception. It does not set a good example to the council. • Grants of right of way Catts Alley – can some of these funds be moved into something more useful. This fund covers resurfacing of Catts Alley, and we may need it in the future. • Community centre – Lighting in the Community Centre car park is required which can be funded from this account or from the Street lighting account as we have upgraded all of the street lighting in Snodland to LED. • Repairs and renewals needs increasing to cover the significant amount of new fencing that is required plus some refurbishment of the Devonshire Rooms. • Rent Charges for the Cemetery Lodge – to be discussed under Confidential. <p>1336 RESOLVED To order a new wing mirror and tailgate for the Truck and arrange for them to be fitted.</p> <p>1337 RESOLVED to ensure that the truck is cleaned every Friday and a log is put in place to record maintenance, damage and cleaning.</p>
11.	<p><u>To consider quotes for the installation of outdoor furniture at Potyns Sportsground.</u></p> <p>The Committee considered the 3 quotes that had been received from the three contractors which varied significantly. Clarification was sought regarding the removal of spoils from Nationcare and the installation of the bench at the cemetery from Pirate fencing which had been received and the costs updated. Nationcare offered the lowest bid at £2,840, Pirate Fencing quoting £2,850, and West Kent Construction providing the highest estimate at £5,145.</p>

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1338	RESOLVED to appoint Nationcare at a cost of £2850 for the installation of the outdoor furniture at Potyns Sportsground, Nevill Park and the Cemetery.
12.	<u>Correspondence</u> - None
	THE COMMITTEE HAS AGREED That in view of the business about to be transacted, it is advisable in the public interest that the press and public be Temporarily excluded and they are instructed to withdraw.
13.	<p><u>To receive notification of the annual salary increases for staff for 2024.</u></p> <p>The Committee noted the annual increase from the Joint National Council for local government service has been received with an increase £1250 per annum for all staff members. Back paid from April and will be paid in Novembers wages.</p>
14.	<p><u>To consider the rent charges for the Cemetery Lodge</u></p> <p>The council had previously discussed the rent relating to the Cemetery Lodge. There are two members of staff who currently reside at the lodge. One retired in July and the second will be retiring at the end of November. The rent was agreed for the lodge and a discounted rate agreed until the gas supply is installed for the installation of central heating.</p>
1339	RESOLVED a discounted rent agreed for the Cemetery lodge until the gas supply has been installed.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 20:52.