Batheaston Parish Council – Council Meeting 14th November 2023
Review of Major Categories of Expenditure

Summary

As part of the preparation of the budget for the 2024/25, the Council wishes to undertake a review of its expenditure to ensure it is achieving value for money. The Clerk has been tasked with preparing this brief review of the five greatest cost categories.

Staff Salaries – projected spend in 2023/24: £39,360

Status: The Council employs four staff, all on a part–time basis with the Clerk working the most hours and on the highest salary scale. The other three roles have contracts that are in aggregate total 66 hours/ month, although some overtime is worked (on a single–time basis unless in exceptional circumstances.

Comment: Given the scale of the tasks facing the Council, and its ambitions to make improvements, the cost of resourcing these is likely to increase. The Council should therefore take this opportunity to conduct a review of its resourcing (which in any case has not been done for some years); there may be options for more effective ways of providing the tasks that it requires.

Proposed Action: staff and resourcing to be reviewed in Human Resources Committee.

Utilities – projected spend in 2023/24: £2,200

Status: The Council has the following supplies for utilities

Water –

Supply to:	Supplier	Annual Cost	Contract Term
Rhymes Pavilion	Wessex Water	£350	rolling contract
Public Conveniences	Wessex Water	£360	rolling contract

Electricity –

Supply to:	Supplier	Annual Cost	Contract Term
Public Conveniences	SSE (Associate Contract, under B&NES)	£290	31/3/24
Rhymes Pavilion	British Gas Lite	£1,000	29/1/26
Floodlights	British Gas Lite	£165 standing charge, 45p/day	29/1/ 26
Streetlights	Yu Energy, un-metered	£850 p.a.	1/2/26

Comment:

The electricity supply to the public conveniences was associate contract, taking advantage of the better rates that B&NES can command and their expertise in overseeing the contract. Unfortunately, I have been notified that this arrangement may come to an end in April 2024, when they move to another supplier.

For the other three electricity contracts which we manage directly, I undertook a lengthy process of reviewing the options, which were approved by Council, January 2023. All of these are now fixed, until early 2026.

The supply of Water and Sewage services has not been reviewed since the market was deregulated in April 2017; we are with the default supplier, Wessex Water for both the Rhymes Pavilion and Public Conveniences. I have made a cursory enquiry to one of the brokers available and it seems that a saving of ca. £130 p.a. is available.

Proposed Actions:

- Confirm options for water supply contracts.
- review suppliers for the electricity to the public conveniences before the expiration of the current B&NES Associate Contract in April.

Grounds Maintenance – projected spend in 2023-24: ca. £5,000

Note that litter-picking and leaf-clearing are undertaken by the Handyman the Council employs. This refers to outsourced services.

Status: For the current year, the projected spend is as follows:

- Grass Cutting: £4,700
- Harmful Weed: £250
- Miscellaneous Items: weeds, and overgrowing vegetation: up to £500

Comment: We reviewed grass cutting services in 2020, and determined that the current supplier offered the best value. The renewal of this contract will be in March 2024 (after the winter pause). For other services we have well-established providers, who we believe provide a good and cost-effective service.

Proposed Action: Clerk to conduct a review of options for grass-cutting services by February 2024.

Grants – projected spend in 2023-24: £5,500

Status: The spend so far this year is £500, with a further £1,000 on the agenda for this meeting. A submission of ca. £500 is expected from the Friends of Batheaston School.

The largest single donation in recent years has been to the Youth Club: no grant was awarded last year, but in the previous 2 years grants of £9,500 (21/22) and £5,600 (20/21 – during Covid-19 lockdown) were given.

Comment: Council decides on the award of grants, subject to a fairly wide set of legislative constraints. In the past few years each decision has been taken in isolation, without a clear policy underpinning the allocation.

Proposed Action:

- Clerk to revise the grant application policy and form for approval at Council.

- Clerk to consult with counterparts to review how others manage the process, whether they have clear policies, and how much they tend to award (as a proportion of Precept and/or total income).

Major maintenance and upgrade work, such as Streetlights, Playground repairs, Riverside maintenance – projected spend in 2023-24: approx. £10,000

Status: Spend in this category varies according to necessity; last year a considerable amount was spent on repair and upgrade of streetlights (ca. £14k since December 2021; three financial years). It is hoped that this will not continue; the bulk of our inventory is now up to date, and we are hoping that B&NES will adopt those that are not (which are all on the Highway).

A major item this year, approved in September 2023, is the repair of the Secret Garden wall, which is expected to be up to £7,500. Other spends are in the playground, where repairs are regularly highlighted, with an average cost of ca. £2,000 p.a.

Comment: I am about to embark on a comprehensive review of all of the Council's assets, and anticipate that this will reveal more items requiring repair.

Proposed Action: as part of the Asset Review, to provide a long-term maintenance plan, with a budget projection for future years.

Richard Maccabee,
Parish Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer
14th November 2023