

**WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

**Full Council**

**Monday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2023**

**PURPOSE OF REPORT:**

To update the council on activities and delegated decisions made since the previous meeting.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That council notes the report and asks any questions relating to content.**

**MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:**

It has been a few months since the last formal report – this paper aims to update on the main issues that are current within the council, alongside an oversight of the Council Managers work and devolved decisions that have been made.

**Meetings and Activities**

The period since Christmas has been focused on the coming year, whilst continuing to deliver services, develop new approaches within the ‘warm rooms’ project and prepare for the upcoming election. With significant works around the community growing space, the new depot, service and organisational budgeting, policy development, and the continuing discussions around the future direction of the council, it has been a more developmental phase than often.

There have been several piece of positive news that help WCC deliver its ambitions:

- Planning permission for the Depot site means we can work towards delivery of landscaping services on parish for the first time, as well as having space for the ‘Library of Things’, geeks in sheds / repair café, space for the unpaid work team to be based at and a number of other projects. This links to...
- Permission for the community growing space and the positive outcome of the Big Lottery Fund bid, which will enable the establishment of this project with almost £100k of funding over three years towards this. A building, poly tunnel, composting toilet and other infrastructure is all included in this, alongside a contribution towards officer costs for the three years. An excellent result.
- Agreement for Community Infrastructure Funding for 2023/24 towards costs of improving accessibility within community venues (including the Chambers doors) and solar panels and battery storage for Tinkers Bridge Meeting Place. This funding is match funded, but provides over £12k towards these costs.
- An ‘in principle’ decision for a further £40k of match funding towards community centre improvements (see attached paper).

These items are all cause for celebration and are the culmination of months (and in some cases, years) or work towards this. Again, congratulations and thanks are due to the officers responsible for this work. There is, of course, considerable work now needed to action this work, but positive news.

We continue to manage in the absence of the RFO / Operations Manager and credit should be noted for the officers that have stepped in to cover some of the areas usually managed by that post-holder. Marta continues to ensure the finances are covered (see other papers for this meeting, reflecting the positive position), Ian has managed the repairs and maintenance (including the statutory checks that have been outstanding) and the team as a whole has worked within the reduced capacity at the top of the ladder. Thanks offered to everyone for their work.

I have attended a number of meetings, webinars and sessions over the past month:

- Mandy, the Deputy Clerk from Wolverton and Greenleys Town Council spent much of day 'shadowing' me, to develop knowledge and understanding of how different councils work. This was useful in terms of explaining the ways that WCC works, the reasoning for delivering the sessions and services we do and the focus on 'community' that underpins so much of our work. This, alongside provision of a training sessions to BMKALC and an online session with Halewood Town Council around delivery of youth services continues to show the esteem with which Woughton is held and the model of delivery that is seen by others as something to replicate.
- Meeting at the Stadium around the Bowl and summer concerts. I have shared details of these events and passed on concerns noted by councillors around parking and some noise issues.
- Met with Gamiel Yafai who is working with the International Festival (the IF festival, as it is known) and is eager to work with residents in Woughton to see what barriers there may be for them to be included in these events – this is due to a lower engagement level from the parish than others and looking at why this may be. More as and when any firm plans are agreed.
- A really useful meeting to discuss the 'Library of Things', including some liaison with Sarah at MKCC who are eager to support this delivery too. With the news about the depot site, this becomes possible now.

I have also attended online sessions covering year end for pensions\*, the potential for different ways of managing expenses within the council (app based, with software that converts receipts, etc.) and an 'elections preparation' session with MKCC.

The meeting arranged by MKCC to address issues with the resident association on Beanhill took place on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> March. It was well attended and hosted by Kevin Harrison from MKCC Involvement Team. There is some confusion around the situation, but it appears that the RA remains up and running and Lorna remains the Chair. It is felt that there has been a lack of support from MKCC and WCC for BHRA and that Beanhill as an estate has not been treated fairly. WCC has agreed to discuss these concerns with the RA, as well as printing 1000 leaflets advertising the AGM when this is arranged (BHRA will distribute to every property on the estate). The meeting was also attended by Cllr Alan Williamson and Cllr Brian Hepburn who will be able to offer further insights.

Cllr Sue Smith and I also met to discuss the Chairs Awards event – the proposal is that this takes place on the evening of Friday 21<sup>st</sup> April and a request has been made to MK Academy to host. There has been limited feedback with regard to people or groups that may deserve an award from councillors – thank you to those of you who have made suggestions.

Other items for consideration are:

- Elections and engagement around democracy. See additional paper for this meeting.
- Ongoing review of services – the ‘deep dives’. A series of dates has been set for these with limited responses from councillors. There will be a separate invite for the final ‘youth’ session for those involved in that and, once we have any clarity regarding the landscape contract, additional time to fully explore the issues relating to this.
- Service Planning has yet to happen, as a decision was made to place this on hold until the service reviews had taken place. This means that we currently don’t have any service plan for the new council year.

I would request that councillors review their emails on a regular basis to ensure that they are aware of anything that may be of interest and ensure all are able to contribute where they wish to.

### **Devolved decisions.**

Chipper hire. Following a fatal failure to the chipper, a short term solution was needed to ensure we maintained our contract. To this end, a proposal was made by our regular supplier that they would ‘rent’ us a new chipper, on the understanding that if we continued with the new contract, all rental costs would be knocked of the cost of buying. Rental costs for this are the same as rental anywhere else, so this is a good deal. Once clarity is reached on the landscape contract, further discussions will be needed around investment, costs and similar.

### **AUTHOR**

Steve McNay – Council Manager

**Agenda item: FC 195/23**

**WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

**Full Council**

**Monday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2023**

**PURPOSE OF REPORT:**

Update on the budget at the end of February 2023.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- 1. That council notes the report.**
- 2. That further updates are provided at year end.**

**MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:**

With only one month of the financial year remaining, the Council Manager was asked to provide an update of where the budget was, what the year end figure is likely to be and whether the overall position is manageable.

The budget that was set at the beginning of this council year (starting in April 2022), budgeted for the following:

Income	£1,020,650.19
Expenditure	£1,057,119.22

This left a deficit of **£36,469.03**.

In September, when the budget was reviewed following some significant changes (replacement roof at TBMP, additional costs associated with IT, cost of living impacts, etc.), the figures changed to:

Income	£1,053,150.73 (an additional £23,150)
Expenditure	£1,111,202.41 (an additional £54,083)

The new deficit was therefore **£58,051.68**.

Throughout the year, due to higher than anticipated costs, it has been expected that the council would need to use reserves (i.e. have less money left over) at year end.

The council spends, on average, just over £90,000 per month (based on the spend to the end of Feb divided by the 11 months from April – Feb). As things currently stand (at the end of February), the figures are:

Income	£1,078,244.01 (around £25,000 ahead of budget)
Expenditure	£993,010.75 (with one month to go)

Current surplus is £144,095.72 (this is basically amount in vs amount out leaves the surplus).

It is anticipated that March will be a month where spending is higher than average, with the depot site and some other larger spends due. However, it is NOT anticipated that this will be as much as £145,000.

This suggests that rather than a deficit this year, the council is likely to break even or, possibly, have a small surplus. This is an excellent result and reflects both a level of additional income that is higher than anticipated and controls on spending that reflect the uncertainty of the current situation.

It should be noted that next year, whilst still a balanced budget, has seen expenditure increase (see separate paper relating to these changes). It should also be noted that there is a further paper that requests additional financial contributions towards infrastructure projects – these changes do mean that whilst savings have been made, they will be needed over the coming months. There is also an additional paper going to Operations that, if agreed, will lead to additional money in the staffing budget.

**STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:**

None.

**OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

None.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

None.

**AUTHOR**

Steve McNay – Council Manager

**Agenda item: FC 196/23**

**WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

**Full Council**

**Monday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2023**

**PURPOSE OF REPORT:**

To update council on some new financial considerations and to propose further investigations and adjustments to budgets for the 2023/2024 year.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- 1. That council notes this report and potential impact on budgets.**
- 2. That council agrees to further investigations with MKCC around insurance monies, levels, how they are set, etc.**
- 3. That council agrees to minor changes to budgets to reflect the additional demands of legal compliance that have not previously been separated out, including breakdown of 'running costs' within No 95 and depot.**

**MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:**

Since the budget setting process, some changes have come to light that may impact on next year, including additional costs that were unknown at time of budget creation.

*Insurance Rent*

An invoice was received from MKCC relating to 'insurance costs' for Coffee Hall Meeting Place. This invoice was for slightly under £300 and covered an annual period (November – October, strangely). Upon investigation, this relates to a clause within the lease agreement that states that the renter shall pay 'insurance rent' annually. MKCC have previously not claimed this, but it is legally correct.

Insurance rent is to cover '*...the landlord's insurance costs, including the premiums for both building insurance and loss of rent cover, any excesses, and the cost of an annual valuation.*'

The Council Manager is continuing to investigate how the figure is arrived at and how MKCC arrived at this figure. It is also worth noting that the clause is also contained within the leases for Netherfield Meeting Place and No95 – again, the Council Manager is continuing to investigate what this may mean financially. What is clear is that this will now become an annual payment due and may mean annual payments for each of our centres (Eaglestone remains unclear at this point).

ADDITIONAL – Netherfield is chargeable and will be £281 this year. No 95 is not at this point. MKCC has agreed to provide information on how figures are decided and the Council Manager will update as and when this is received.

## *Compliance Checks*

As you may have seen over the past few months, significant work has been undertaken to ensure legal compliance within the buildings that WCC manages. This has included gas checks, electrical

installation checks, water and legionnaires checks, asbestos checks and similar. These checks are due to be undertaken on a regular basis, varying dependent on the type (gas checks annually, electrical installation checks on a five-year cycle, etc.). Some have not, to this point, been undertaken in accordance with these expectations and so there has been a higher than anticipated spend both on checks and on remedial works.

The standard costs vary slightly, but are approximately:

Legionella testing	£272 per venue	(£1904 in total)
Electrical installations £5,000+ to fix)	£400 - £700 per venue	(£4122 in total plus
Asbestos checks	£234 per venue	(£1638 in total)
Gas checks	£110 per venue	(£770 plus remedial works)

This equates to £11,500 every five years (everything on a five yearly cycle, bar gas which is annual) or an additional £2,500 per year on maintenance costs. It should also be noted that the remedial works needed following these investigations led to further costs of over £10,000 (including electrical works and new boilers at two venues) – this should mean less additional investment needed but as mentioned previously, reflects the challenges of managing an aging estate.

## *Pension costs*

Since the budget was set, the annual 'opt in / opt out' of pension discussions have taken place, resulting in four more officers joining the scheme. This means that all but one eligible staff member is now in the scheme. However, this also means an additional liability for the council in terms of contributions, equal to around £15,000 per annum.

## *Budget headings and recording*

This issue will be discussed fully at the Operations Committee but will cover some suggested changes in how budgets are presented, additional lines within budget reports (such as a breakdown of 'running costs' within Youth and Landscape budgets – currently includes all building costs, rather than separating gas, electric, water, rates, etc.).

It is recommended that the Council Manager continues to liaise with MKCC with regard to the insurance and compliance issues to see what the long-term impact is and provides further insight as and when new information is provided, via the Operations Committee.

**STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:**

None.

**OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

None.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

None.

**AUTHOR**

Steve McNay – Council Manager



**Agenda item: FC 197/23**

**WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

**Full Council**

**Monday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2023**

**PURPOSE OF REPORT:**

To propose investment in community centres, following additional funding being allocated from MKCC.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- 1. That council notes the report and previous papers.**
- 2. That council agrees to accept and match the proposed £40,000 contribution from MKCC towards updating the community centres.**
- 3. That the funding pot includes monies allocated via the successful CIF bids for 2023/24, that includes some work around accessibility.**
- 4. That council considers the best way to allocate this money, based upon whether any further spending is planned over the coming year(s), focusing on what is needed most.**
- 5. That, assuming that council agrees to point 2 above, that the Council Manager makes a detailed proposal to Operations Committee around priorities and more 'urgent' works.**

**MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:**

There has been significant discussion over the past five (5) years around the need to improve the community centres that WCC manages / owns. Despite much discussion, repairs and maintenance have been on a crisis basis, rather than planned improvements – mending things when they go wrong, replacing things when no other option is viable and 'making do' whilst agreement is reached.

As part of discussion with MKCC and quotes being provided relating to CHMP and TBMP, MKCC has suggested that they will 'match fund' £40,000 worth of investment into the centres, to help bring them up to standard. This was in response to the two quotes which were available at that time, rather than being related to the most pressing issues.

Alongside this funding, WCC applied for and was successful in receiving 'match funding' for a series of improvements to facilities within community centres, including TB, CH and NF as well as accessibility upgrades to the Chamber doors. This funding provides an additional £8,144 towards these improvements and will help deliver accessible facilities.

This paper, therefore, makes proposals around allocating additional monies to 'match fund' these initiatives and, if council agrees to this, for a programme of works to be created, focusing on the priorities that are considered to be 'pressing'.

It should also be noted that these works will be considerable and time consuming and will require centres to be closed for weeks to complete. Working around this will also be an essential part of any planning towards these improvements.

**STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:**

None.

**OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

None.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

None.

**AUTHOR**

Steve McNay – Council Manager

**WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

**Full Council**

**Monday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2023**

**PURPOSE OF REPORT:**

To propose the purchase of a four-wheel-drive vehicle (a 'pickup') to replace the leased vehicle currently used.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- 1. That council considers this report.**
- 2. That council agrees to replace the pickup truck.**
- 3. That council agrees to purchase a pickup, up to the value of £20,000 (excl. VAT)**
- 4. That council agreed to delegate the choice of vehicle to the Landscape Manager / Council Manager, based upon the most suitable option available.**

**MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:**

The council currently runs a fleet of four (4) vehicles, plus two (2) ride on mowers. These are the vehicles that are considered to be 'road legal' – the tipper truck (landscape Transit), the electric environment car (EVIE), the Nissan van (used by all) and the blue pickup truck.

The pickup (a Mitsubishi LV200) is a leased vehicle that ran alongside the landscaping contract. This lease was originally three (3) years, but was extended to bring into line with the landscape contract. The total cost of the lease will be £13,044.37 (excluding VAT - £15,653.46 incl.) when it ends in June – this is for a total of 42 months.

This paper proposes that rather than another lease, council invests in a pickup as an asset. This is a similar approach to that which was suggested for the white Nissan van – this had previously been provided via a lease at a cost of around £12,000 for three years. The van cost around £14,000 and, three years later, has a value of around £8,000, meaning that the cost over three years was half that of a lease (even when servicing, repairs, MOT's and tax is included).

Pickup trucks are more expensive and, to ensure that it is suitable for use across the council (e.g. pulling the trailer(s), backing up the landscape team, offering additional vehicular use when necessary), it is recommended that a low mileage, second hand variant is explored. For around £20,000, a suitable vehicle of less than 5 year old, under 40,000 miles is possible (but rare). A vehicle with a suitably sized engine, twin cab, tow bar and lockable rear storage is needed.

Vehicles such as a Nissan Navara, Isuzu D-Max or Ford Ranger would meet the expected standard.

Whilst it is acknowledged that there remain queries around the landscape contract, this vehicle is necessary if council wishes to continue to use the trailer and for a variety of other uses, as well as being needed for any new landscaping delivery.

Another query posed was whether we could move to an electric pickup – whilst this is possible (e.g. <https://www.vanarama.com/van-leasing/maxus/t90/electric-130kw-pickup-885kwh-auto-2022>) it remains unclear as to whether a) this would provide the level of towing power needed and b) is prohibitively expensive\*. There are also concerns regarding delivery times, no four-wheel drive capacity and generally unknowns about this new technology.

\*(The deal noted above is £600 per month over three years – it does reduce slightly if a 5-year contract is taken out - £545 per month, both with an 'up front' payment of £6,000+. This is equal to over £25k for a three-year lease or just under £40k for five years. Cost of buying is £50k + VAT).

It is recommended that council agrees to buying, rather than leasing (it should be noted that a four – five year old pickup is around £20K, with 10 year old vehicles being around £10 - £12k).

The current lease deal equates to around £310 per month.

Buying at £20k over 10 years equates to £166.66 per month. Assuming a further £1000 per year towards tax, MOT, servicing, etc., this rises to £249 a month.

Over the course of 10 years, this equates to a saving of £60 per month or £7200 in total, plus any residual value of the vehicle (estimated to be around £5k after 10 years).

#### **STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:**

None.

#### **OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

There are risks when buying, rather than leasing. These include large repair bills, changing technology, reduced efficiency and so on. It is anticipated that after 10 years, it is likely that electric vehicle technology will have improved sufficiently to provide real options for this type of use. However, based upon the information and options currently available, this approach balances the need for a suitable vehicle, the cost / benefit analysis and the potential for savings over the course of the 10 year period (assuming savings noted above, around £1200 per year lower costs).

#### **BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

None.

**AUTHOR**

Steve McNay – Council Manager

**Agenda item: FC 199/23**

**WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

**Full Council**

**Monday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2023**

**PURPOSE OF REPORT:**

To propose a series of engagement events to take place over March, encouraging residents to stand for election AND / OR sign up for postal votes / election ID.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- 1. That council considers the following dates for engagement events during March.**
- 2. That these events include councillors and officers, relevant papers, and publicity.**
- 3. That residents are provided with information around standing for election, postal votes and voter ID.**
- 4. That these events promote local councils, democracy and involvement.**

**MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:**

Following a previous paper that came to council for agreement, times and dates relating to the upcoming election have now been shared and some clarity around current councillors (and therefore possibly vacancies) is known.

It is clear that there are likely to be a number of seats where current councillors chose not to stand for re-election. There are also existing vacancies that have not been filled following resignations. This means that having candidates for the May election is crucial if WCC is to remain a fully elected body. If there are unfilled seats, there are also issues around General Power of Competence being applicable – WCC must have 15 elected representative to maintain that power.

In addition to the issues around candidates, there are also issues relating to voter ID and ensuring that everyone who wants to vote is able to do so. This will be the first election where people will need ID to vote in person and there remains a significant number of people who are unaware of this OR the potential to get specific ID for this purpose at no cost.

To ensure that democracy is promoted, WCC has agreed that some resources will be provided towards this. This includes ensuring that people are on the electoral register, that they have suitable ID if voting in person or that they register for postal votes.

Some work has started towards this, with online campaigns, leaflets and posters being placed in community venues and discussions taking place. However, for some, these approaches won't be sufficient. As such, in person, advertised sessions where

information and relevant paperwork is provided with support to help complete it where appropriate, may be useful.

The relevant dates for these elections are:

- Nomination papers for candidates to be delivered to MKCC by 4pm on 4<sup>th</sup> April.
- Deadline to register to vote – midnight on 17<sup>th</sup> April
- Deadline to register for a postal vote – 5pm on 18<sup>th</sup> April
- Deadline for an application for a Voter Authority Certificate (the ID needed to vote if nothing else in place) – 5pm on 24<sup>th</sup> April.

It is recommended that this information continues to be shared widely, with countdowns where appropriate to remind everyone of upcoming deadlines.

In discussion with the Chair of WCC, it has also been suggested that sessions take place within existing activities (e.g. community cafes, etc.) and that some evening events also take place to encourage people to take part, either as candidates or simply to support access to the elections.

The following existing sessions are suggested for information sharing and engagement:

- |   |                                  |      |
|---|----------------------------------|------|
| - Netherfield Community Café<br>(2.30pm)        | Monday 13 <sup>th</sup> March    | NFMP |
| - Residents Association Forum<br>Chambers (6pm) | Tuesday 14 <sup>th</sup> March   |      |
| - Eaglestone Café<br>(3.30pm)                   | Wednesday 15 <sup>th</sup> March | EAC  |
| - Warm Space at Tinkers Bridge<br>(5pm)         | Thursday 16 <sup>th</sup> March  | TBMP |
| - Coffee Hall Cafes<br>(various)                | W/C 20 <sup>th</sup> March       | CHMP |

It is also suggested that additional evening sessions are offered at Coffee Hall and Netherfield, as well as checking to see what options are possible on Beanhill (Friday afternoon café would seem sensible). Councillors are encouraged to provide days / times where they are available to support these sessions, but based upon bookings, other meetings and suitable times, the following slots are suggested:

Coffee Hall Meeting Place – Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> March from 6pm  
Netherfield Meeting Place – Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> March from 6pm

It is also proposed that the trailer is used to offer similar on Peartree Bridge and Leadenhall on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> March, around lunchtime.

#### **STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:**

The Council Manager can attend (and open / close) any of the sessions noted above and, once agreed, other officers can, if so wish, be available to support as well. For

most of the sessions, there is one or more councillors already in attendance (except for the two evening sessions noted at CHMP and NFMP) – if those councillors are happy to be directed towards if people would like to discuss with an elected rep, that would mean most sessions are covered within existing resources.

**OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

None.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

None.

**AUTHOR**

Steve McNay – Council Manager