

BRACKLA COMMUNITY COUNCIL



FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING 14 December 2020 at 6.30 pm Via Video Link

Members Present
Cllr Keith Hughes (Chair)
Cllr David Aston
Cllr K Rowlands
Cllr Tyler Walsh

Mrs R Keepins – Clerk of the Council
Mr P Ley – Assistant Clerk/Responsible Finance Officer
Miss H May – Admin Officer

11 Apologies for Absence Cllr J Spanswick

12 Declarations of Interest

Clerk of the Council, Mrs R Keepins, declared a personal interest in relation to item 13, Findings of HR/Personnel Committee.

Assistant Clerk/Responsible Finance Officer, Mr P Ley, declared a personal interest in relation to item 13, Findings of HR/Personnel Committee.

Admin Officer, Miss H May, declared a personal interest in relation to item 13, Findings of HR/Personnel Committee.

13 Findings of HR/Personnel Committee

The Clerk presented the recommendations of the HR/Personnel Committee which included a request that the Finance Committee consider the available finances for a permanent Admin Assistant role.

The Committee discussed the various options already considered by the HR/Personnel Committee including the proposal to reduce the Assistant Clerk/Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) role down to 18 hours per week, which would make approximately £6000.00 available. Further discussions were held around the possible hours for an Admin Assistant post and whether to set the wage in line with the Living wage as was the case for the Community Centre staff. It was confirmed that the HR/Personnel Committee had not yet determined any proposed job roles or job descriptions and would look to do this before March 2021. Essentially if the Assistant Clerk/RFO hours were reduced, the proposal was to remove the Assistant Clerk part of this position and transfer the responsibilities to an Admin Assistant or separate Assistant Clerk. Members of the HR/Personnel Committee confirmed that they had discussed the possibility of a 16-hour post for this position.

Members briefly discussed the recent Clerk Review meeting that had been held between the Chair of the Council, the Vice Chair and the Clerk. The Chair of the Finance Committee advised that he had discussed the outcome of this review and it was recommended that the Clerk's pay scale be considered for an increase to Scale Point 26 (using the National Joint Council Local Government Services pay rates) from the beginning of the new financial year. This could be considered as part of any new staff structure.

Further queries were raised regarding the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on this year's budget and whether any change of staffing would have any further impact on the budget for next year. The RFO advised that the pandemic had had a significant impact on the Community Centre budget but due to the Community Council's events not being able to run this year, the funds would more than cover any predicted loss from the Community Centre. He further advised that the events for next year had already been accounted for in the draft precept and therefore there were no major concerns on the budget for 2021-22. The Chair confirmed that the Community Council would be starting off the year in a strong financial position.

Resolved:

The Finance Committee recommend that a further meeting of the HR/Personnel Committee be arranged to consider in more detail the proposals for a reduction of hours for the RFO and the future Admin Assistant/Assistant Clerk role. Based on the feedback from Members of the HR/Personnel Committee, the Finance Committee discussed the possible affordability of an Admin Assistant/Assistant Clerk for a 16 hour working week. It was recommended that further detail of these job descriptions be considered as well as proposed hours, in order to determine work demand and potential work allocation. Furthermore, that options be considered as to whether to progress with a permanent position for the Admin

Assistant/Assistant Clerk or to introduce a temporary contract in order to allow time to determine the affordability and impact on future finances.

Clarification on a possible extension of the current apprenticeship role beyond March 2021 would also help determine the timeline for several key HR decisions on how to progress this item.

14. Precept/Budget 2021-22

The Chair highlighted that there had been some changes made to the draft precept following on from the Committee's last meeting. He also advised that there were lots of unanswered questions regarding 2021-22 such as that relating to the proposed work on the Community Centre and any possible large projects going forward. Much discussion had been held at the last Finance meeting with a range of views expressed regarding what should be recommended for the proposed precept for 2021-22. The Chair pointed out that if the Council wanted to undertake large projects in the future, they would obviously need to think about increasing the precept as well as look at other avenues of funding. However, he pointed out that given that the Community Council could achieve what it needed to on the same budget as last year, and considering the difficult year experienced by all during the pandemic, he was still of the opinion to maintain the same precept level of £169,630.00.

Cllrs K Rowlands and T Walsh echoed these views stating that they did not see a need to increase the precept if it was not necessary, particularly during the current climate. The Chair further commented that maintaining the same precept level would send out a better signal to people and set a good example during this time.

Cllr D Aston stated that whilst he appreciated that this had been a hard year for many, there were lots of unknowns for next year and whilst the Community Council could apply for grants, there was no guarantee that these would be successful or to what extent the Community Council would have to match fund them. With these unknowns as well as an upcoming election in 2022, he commented that the Community Council could not keep taking funds from the Reserve budgets. Given the fact that the Community Council had been fairly static in its budget setting for the last 3 years, he proposed that the Committee recommend an increase in the precept by the cost of living which equated to a 0.9% increase.

Resolved:

Following detailed discussion and deliberation the Committee made the following recommendations in relation to the precept budget for Brackla Community Council for 2021-22:

It is recommended that the Council precept for 2021—22 be maintained at the same level of £169,630.00 with only a 0.64% increase to counter the reduced base rate as highlighted in the revised precept document. Whilst appreciating that if further projects are to undertaken by the Community Council there may need to be consideration given in the future to increasing the precept, the Committee agreed that 2020 had been a very difficult year for many and therefore the Council should set a good example and look to achieve what it wants to within the same precept amount.

It is also recommended that the Community Council be more proactive in exploring options for external funding to assist towards any major future projects and also consider applying for any future financial assistance offered to help counteract any further financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

15. Proposed Works to Footpaths surrounding Archbishop McGrath RC Comprehensive School and Sports Centre

The Committee considered the proposals from the County Borough Council for works to the footpaths around Archbishop McGrath Comprehensive School and sports centre as well as a request for possible financial assistance towards this.

Members commented that whilst this was an important piece of work that needed to be done, there was concern over whether the Community Council were in a position to support this financially at this time. It was also pointed out that the unfortunate lack of detail as to the costings of the project and what was being requested, prevented the Committee from exploring this in detail.

Resolved:

The Finance Committee welcome the proposed works to the footpaths around Archbishop McGrath RC Comprehensive school and support the Borough Council in this project. However, due to current pressures on the Community Council at this time and the unknown detail of what contribution is actually being requested, it is recommended that the Community Council are unfortunately not in a position to offer financial assistance to this project.

Signed by the Chairperson 2020/21

Cllr Keith Hughes

Dated: