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WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM

Thursday, 14 September 2023

Attendance:

Councillors

Reach (Chairperson)

Batho
Becker
Edwards
Eve
Learney
Morris

Prest
Scott
Tippett-Cooper
Thompson
Tod
Wise

[Full video recording](#)

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Westwood.

2. **DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS**

Councillor Tod declared a personal (but non prejudicial) interest concerning agenda items that may be related to his role as a County Councillor.

Councillor Thompson declared a personal (but non prejudicial) interest in respect of item 6 (Town Forum Grants Programme Update) due to her role as council representative on the Play to the Crowd Board.

3. **CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Hiscock, Hampshire County Council, to the meeting and thanked Councillors Batho and Tippett-Cooper for their excellent work carried out on the community speedwatch scheme since the last meeting had taken place.

4. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 15 June 2023 be approved and adopted.

5. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Ian Tait spoke in relation to item 7 (Winchester City Street Market Management Contract and Operating Policy). A summary of his comments are contained under the relevant item below.

6. **TOWN FORUM GRANTS PROGRAMME UPDATE (WTF321)**

The Chair of the forum introduced the report which set out details of the grants awarded and outcomes achieved from the community grants programme in 2022/23 with as operated by the forum and included contributions to core funded organisations, a project grant scheme and a small grant scheme and outlined the programme for delivery in 2023/24. The forum were asked to note the achievements and successes of the grant programmes over the last year.

The Town Centre and Community Manager stated that over the last financial year the budget had been fully spent. In addition, funding had also been provided to organisations within the town area to provide support with the cost of living and it was noted that the reach across the town regarding community and member engagement had increased to support the programme. However, the continued support of members was sought to encourage applications.

Members asked a range of comments and questions which were responded to by the Town Centre and Community Manager and the Funding and Development Manager. These included methods of advertisement used to promote the grant schemes, drop-in sessions on the application process etc. Members help was sought to 'spread the word' about the availability of funding grants to interested organisations and groups in their communities.

RESOLVED:

1. The achievements and successes of the Small Grant and Project Grant programmes in 2022-23 be noted;
2. The important role of members in supporting the community engagement process and encouraging grant applications, be noted;
3. That the impending review of the overall council community grants programme as part of TC25, the outcome of which will feed into the proposal to address budget reductions to the Town Forum grants budget in 2025/26 and 2026/27, be noted;
4. That the Corporate Head of Economy and Community be delegated authority to approve the grant criteria and allocations, in consultation with the Winchester Town Forum (Town Vision) Informal Group;
5. That the allocated grant budget of £40k for small grants / project grants is used flexibly and the split is adjusted to meet the relative demand for these grants, as in previous years, be noted; and

6. That the £10,000 budget saving requested by the Winchester Town Account Informal Accounts Group, achieved by the reduction of the Project Grant budget by £10,000 for 2024/25, be approved.

7. **WINCHESTER CITY STREET MARKET MANAGEMENT CONTRACT AND OPERATING POLICY (CAB3427)**

Ian Tait addressed the Forum on this item. In summary, he made reference to the following points:

- Supporter of the market since it moved from Middle Brook Street to the High Street in 2011.
- Initially there had been concerns raised at the time by residents and a number of businesses about the competition the market would have with the High Street. However, over the years existing local businesses had commented that the market had significantly improved trading conditions since it was relocated.
- Markets make high streets more resilient. Winchester has low retail unit vacancy rates as a result and there were major retail and hospitality businesses who were keen to come to the town centre.
- Advocates the return of the market to the upper section of the High Street, outside The Ivy, as he believed the market worked well in that location.
- He suggested the success of the market was also dependant on other aspects, including the cleanliness of public conveniences, market trader parking.
- The deterioration of the farmers market over recent years shows that to thrive and for their continued success markets need to be treated sensitively.

In response to the matters raised by Mr Tait, the Cabinet Member for Business and Culture confirmed that a report had just been considered at Cabinet seeking improvements to the provision of public conveniences in the town centre and the issues regarding market trader parking and the farmers market would be explored further with officers.

The Cabinet Member for Business and Culture introduced the report which set out the Winchester Street Market Operating Policy that provided a framework for the operation of the city street market in response to the review of the city street market and the need to align its operation with the priorities set out in the council plan. It was noted that the Operating Policy, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report, would form part of the specification for the tender process to procure a market operator for an initial term of three years. The forum were asked to comment on the report prior to its consideration by Business and Housing Policy Committee and by Cabinet for approval in October.

Reference was made to the findings and recommendations set out in the independent report carried out by The Retail Group during 2022 which outlined suggested improvements to the market offer, including branding and signage and expansion by incorporating early evening and themed markets.

Members asked a range of comments and questions which were responded to by the relevant Cabinet Members and Service Lead: Economy and Tourism, these included the following matters:

- The difference between the expenditure and income figures in the forecasting budget – it was noted that the market was performing above expectation so the forecast had now been adjusted and would be clarified with the finance team.
- A request that the Equality Impact Assessment be added as a draft to the paper when it is taken to Business and Housing Policy Committee.
- The terms and conditions to be placed in the policy to control the criteria for trading within the size of the pitch space only and the measures taken to enforce this where an infringement takes place.
- Rebranding the quality of the market experience – themes, use of bunting, gazebos, controls over sales, tables and chair's etc
- The need to remember the historic purpose of a market being where people visit to obtain affordable goods and a cheaper offer than they would experience in a retail store, particularly in light of the cost-of-living crisis.
- The location of the market and how it operates and its ability to adapt to other changes in the area with Central Winchester Regeneration, Winchester Movement Strategy etc as the city landscape evolves.
- Principles to manage the layout of the stalls in the High Street, access space and plans to co-ordinate with pavement licences to enable the flow of footfall.
- That the aspirations and feedback of street market users be considered.

At the conclusion of debate, the forum supported the plans for the evolution of the street market, welcomed the opportunity to continue to see the High Street thrive and thanked officers for the progress carried out to date.

RESOLVED:

That the comments raised by the forum, as summarised above, be noted.

8. **UPDATE ON PARKING AGENCY AGREEMENT CHANGES WITH HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL (VERBAL UPDATE)**

The Head of Programme: Place provided a verbal update on the agency agreements the council had with Hampshire County Council (HCC) over a number of years, two of which (traffic management and on street parking) would be taken back from all of the district councils in the county by HCC back into their central management. The traffic management agency returned to HCC in April 2023, with the on-street parking management and enforcement agency due to return to HCC on 1 October 2023.

It was noted that over the last year planning had been put in place to restructure teams and work streams as the council would continue to retain its responsibility for off street car parks and their related season tickets. It was reported that HCC would be using a private company (NSL) for all on street parking enforcement to act on their behalf going forward and the on-street waivers and suspensions,

highway parking permits and on street management and administration of the Winchester on street Residents' Parking Scheme would all also transfer back to HCC in October.

It was reported that interim arrangements had been put in place in a number of areas, including all off street parking provisions currently allowed for inner area residents entitled to a permit to park in car parks at weekend would remain in place for at least 12 months and affected residents had been contacted in writing regarding proposed changes.

The Head of Programme: Place stated that HCC would adopt a similar approach to the one taken by the council, with several amendments that HCC would move to an online digital scheme for residents, that no concession would be granted to electric vehicles and that motorcycles would now require a permit. However, all residents would be notified to make the transition a smooth process going forward.

Members asked questions which were responded to by the Head of Programme: Place in relation to the availability of electric vehicle charging points for residents living in the town centre area.

RESOLVED:

That the verbal update be received and noted.

9. **WINCHESTER TOWN ACCOUNT FINANCIAL PLANNING 2023/24 (WTF322)**

The Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency introduced the report in her capacity as Chair of the Town Accounts Informal Group and drew members attention to the projections which indicated that high inflation was placing a significant pressure on the town budget for several years to come. The forum noted that there was limited opportunity to generate additional income and operated under the government capping regime. It was reported that projections had significantly improved over the next few years as a result of reprofiling play area expenditure and work was outstanding to review open spaces and cemeteries in due course. It was recognised that difficult decisions would need to be made going forward to close the remaining budget shortfall.

The Finance Manager (Strategic Finance) provided an update of the current financial position of the Winchester Town Account and financial projections over the medium and long term to support the development of a refreshed financial strategy with final budget recommendations due for consideration by Town Forum in January 2024, prior to final approval by Cabinet and Council. In addition, he stated that feedback from the Winchester Town Forum Accounts Informal Group had been incorporated within this report and that a further report on the budget options would come forward for consideration by the Town Forum at its meeting on 8 November 2023.

RESOLVED:

1. That the financial projections, set out in Appendix 1 of the report be noted and the budget timetable for 2024/25, be agreed.

10. **BUDGET REVIEW: PLAY REFURBISHMENT PROGRAMME - INITIAL DRAFT OPTIONS (WTF323)**

The Service Lead: Community and Wellbeing and the Cabinet Member for Community and Engagement introduced the report which was provided as part of the medium-term financial strategy planning, requested by the forum, to review areas of its expenditure and identify ways that costs could be reduced; this included the play area refurbishment programme. The report set out the initial options and the likely implications of reducing expenditure within this programme which was likely to result in cost reductions and the deferral of costs to a later date, with greater detail on these options due to come forward to the next meeting of the forum in November 2023.

It was noted that four option levels of replacement and repair has been initially considered, as outlined within the report with appendix 2 sets out an example of the budget cost reduction options that could be achieved and that work on this matter would continue to be progressed in ongoing discussion with the Town Forum Parks and Recreation Informal Group.

Members asked a range of comments and questions which were responded to by the Cabinet Member for Community and Engagement and the Service Lead: Community and Wellbeing, these included the following matters:

- Talavera Road (broken equipment) – it was noted that guidelines on timescales for condition works taking place would be provided in the next paper coming forward. By moving to a proposed repair over replace approach, it was anticipated that work on individual playgrounds maybe more reactive when repairs are required.
- Seeking views of members and users on preferred and popular equipment at play areas.
- Creation of a rolling programme to be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure engagement and consultation remains effective and equipment remains safe acceptable for users within a reduced budget.

At the conclusion of debate, the forum thanked officers for the progress carried out to date and welcomed further discussion on this matter at the next meeting.

RESOLVED:

1. That the work undertaken to review the play area refurbishment programme to date, be noted; and
2. That the detailed options paper would be considered at the next meeting of the forum on 8 November 2023.

11. **INFORMAL GROUP - VERBAL UPDATE**

The Forum received individual updates from the Chairpersons of various Town Informal Groups, where updates had not already been provided within the items considered above. Each summarised the work that had been carried out by the respective groups over the previous two-month period.

Councillor Tippett-Cooper – Heritage Group

Progress updates from the group included focus on the following three projects:

- (i) St Maurice's Tower – Works required within the next 1-5 years following inspection by structural engineers – progress will be updated throughout the year
- (ii) The Buttercross – works to the monument required consent by Historic England – following surveys conducted, a plan had been in place, subject to consent, to repair, clean and pigeon proof the monument – with the plan proposals for restoration due to be put forward by the end of 2023
- (iii) Hyde Abbey Gateway – pigeon deterrent installed but not entirely successful – new netting and associated works are due to be installed by contractors at no extra cost. Floodlights are to be installed and repairs to the building and replacements of the decayed bollards, are also due to be taken forward for consent by Historic England in due course.

Councillor Edwards – City Centre Group

Progress updates from the group included:

- (i) Commercial Waste Bins – the group continued to work closely with BID to improve the management of commercial waste in the city centre which had become challenging with the increase in food and beverage premises that generate larger quantities of waste. Bins in the paved area between St George's Street and God Begot House had become an eyesore and the plan was to install a new bin store to lessen the impact and works would be completed by March 2024.

In addition, the bin store in the Cossack Lane car park was due to be extended so fewer commercial bins were left on city streets.

A new approach and partnership was required to change thinking and reduce the volume of waste disposed of in commercial bins going forward.

RESOLVED:

That the updates received from the Town Informal Groups, be noted.

12. **WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24**

RESOLVED:

That, the work programme for 2023/24 be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 8.15 pm

Chairperson