

Ringwood Town Council

Ringwood Gateway, The Furlong, Ringwood, Hampshire BH24 1AT
Tel: 01425 473883
www.ringwood.gov.uk

SUMMONS

Dear Member

25th January 2024

You are hereby summoned to attend a meeting of the Town Council at the Forest Suite, Ringwood Gateway on 31st January 2024 at 7.00pm.



Mr C Wilkins
Town Clerk

AGENDA

1.* PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There will be an opportunity for public participation for a period of up to 15 minutes at the start of the meeting

2. To receive Apologies for Absence

3. To receive Declarations of Interest

4. POLICE REPORT

To receive a report from Ringwood Police

5. To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting on 20th December 2023

6. To receive Minutes of Committees and Task and Finish Group and approve recommendations contained therein:

Recreation, Leisure & Open Spaces

DATE :- 3rd January 2024

Planning, Town & Environment

DATE:- 5th January 2024

Policy & Finance

DATE:- 24th January 2024

RECOMMENDATION: F/6263 Council Budget 2024/25 (see separate agenda item)

Communications Task & Finish Group

DATE:- 31st October 2023 & 16th

January 2024 (*Report A*)

7. COUNCIL BUDGET 2024 - 25

To consider the Finance Managers report (*Report B*) and recommendations from Policy and Finance Committee (*F/6263 refers*) to:-

i) To approve the budget for 2024 – 25

ii) To approve the precept requirement for 2024 – 25 of £643,525

8. MOTION ON FLOODING

To consider a motion put forward by Cllrs Thierry and Georgiou as follows:-

Ringwood Town Councillors, being made aware, by residents of the continual disruption to Ringwood residents and damage to property occasioned by flooding,

request and invite an appropriate Officer from Hampshire County Council responsible for flood management attend a meeting of the Planning, Town & Environment Committee enabling Council Members to be briefed on, and bring scrutiny to the measures the County has, currently and in the future, to effectively deal with flooding within the town and the immediate area.

9. SPORTS DEVELOPMENT PROJECT AT LONG LANE

To receive a report from Cllr Briers (the Council's representative on the Steering Group) or Cllr Swyer (deputy) on project developments

10.* To receive such communications as the Town Mayor may desire to lay before the Council

11.* To receive Reports from County and District Councillors

12.* To Receive Reports from Ringwood Town Councillors

13. Forthcoming Meetings – to note the following dates:

Planning, Town & Environment	10.00am	Friday 2 nd February 2024
Recreation, Leisure & Open Spaces	7.00pm	Wednesday 7 th February 2024
Policy & Finance	7.00pm	Wednesday 21 st February 2024
Full Council	7.00pm	Wednesday 28 th February 2024

14. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

To consider exclusion of the press and public from the meeting, in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, section 1(2), to transact business for which publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of its confidential nature

15. COMMUNITY AWARDS NOMINATIONS

To invite Members to consider nominations for Community Awards

If you would like further information on any of the agenda items, please contact Mr Chris Wilkins, Town Clerk, on 01425 484720 or chris.wilkins@ringwood.gov.uk

Council Members:

Chairman: Cllr Gareth Deboos, Town Mayor
Vice-Chairman: Cllr Rae Frederick, Deputy Mayor
Cllr Andrew Briers
Cllr Luke Dadford
Cllr Philip Day
Cllr Ingrid De Bruyn
Cllr Mary DeBoos
Cllr Janet Georgiou
Cllr John Haywood
Cllr Peter Kelleher
Cllr James Swyer
Cllr Michael Thierry
Cllr Glenys Turner
Cllr Becci Windsor

Officers:

Chris Wilkins, Town Clerk
Jo Hurd, Deputy Town Clerk

Communications Plan Task & Finish Group

Notes of meeting held at Ringwood Gateway on Tuesday 31st October 2023 at 2pm

- Present: Cllr Mary DeBoos
Cllr Rae Frederick
Cllr Janet Georgiou
Cllr James Swyer
- In attendance: Christopher Wilkins – Town Clerk
Jo Hurd – Deputy Town Clerk
- Absent: None

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Cllr James Swyer was the sole nominee and therefore elected unopposed to chair this group until the first meeting after the next Annual Meeting of the Town Council (or its dissolution if sooner). He took the chair for the remainder of the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Clerk reported that no apologies for absence had been received.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No disclosable pecuniary interests were declared.

4. COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING

Members referred to the notes of Jo's training session by Breakthrough Communications and agreed it made sense, at this early stage anyway, to follow the 8-step process outlined therein (and to attempt the first few steps on our own without seeking professional help – we can always consider training and other external support needs later in the process if this seems likely to be helpful).

Step 1 – Agree the purpose of the plan

It was first agreed that the Communications Plan needed to support and align with the Council's overall Strategy. More specific purposes would help to guide further planning and it was noted that there are good reasons why some of these should be emotional rather than strictly functional. The following purposes were suggested (and are presented here in no particular order):

- i. To make more efficient use of resources by focusing face-to-face engagement on those who most need it and encouraging other forms of engagement;
- ii. To re-engage with young people following the demise of the Student Advisor Scheme;
- iii. To build confidence that the Council is engaging with people about the things that matter to them and focusing resources on these; and
- iv. To promote Ringwood businesses and support the local economy

Step 2 – Review current and previous communications

Members agreed that more information is needed about the effectiveness of current means of communication. An anonymous survey of councillors and staff about this would be useful as would data about website hits and engagement with the Facebook page.

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|---|
| <p>ACTIONS:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Officers will circulate the survey to councillors and staff and forward the responses received to Cllr Swyer.2. Officers will seek and collate whatever data is available about third party engagement with the website and the FB page.3. Cllr Swyer will analyse the responses and produce a synopsis for circulation before the next meeting at which Step 3, a SWOT analysis, will be undertaken. |
|---|

5. NEXT AND SUBSEQUENT MEETINGS

The next meeting will be arranged when the outputs from the actions agreed above are available for discussion and will probably take place via Teams.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 3.37pm.

RECEIVED
29th November 2023

APPROVED

TOWN MAYOR

WORKING PARTY CHAIRMAN

Communications Plan Task & Finish Group

Notes of meeting held on Tuesday 16 January 2024 at 2pm in Teams

Present: Cllr Mary DeBoos
Cllr Rae Frederick
Cllr Janet Georgiou
Cllr James Swyer (Chairman)

In attendance: Christopher Wilkins – Town Clerk
Jo Hurd – Deputy Town Clerk
Charmaine Bennett – Clubhouse & Events Manager

Absent: None

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

All members were present.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No disclosable pecuniary interests were declared.

3. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The notes of the meeting held on 31 October 2024 were approved.

4. REVIEW CURRENT AND PREVIOUS COMMUNICATIONS (STEP 2)

All officers and councillors had been invited to complete a survey, the results of which are outlined in *Annex A*. Although there were only 9 responses, it was felt that those had come from people with the most rounded view on communications, so was a fair representation of the current situation.

The Deputy Town Clerk gave a brief overview of data available from the Town Council website and Facebook page:

Website: 1600 people had viewed the website since Google Analytics was installed at the beginning of December 2023, with an average engagement time of 46 seconds. Most viewed pages were Information Service & Visitor Information; Events; News; Contact Us (2 or 3 enquiries per day are received via the online form); Councillors; Cemetery; and Meetings. 60% of users access the site by mobile phone.

Facebook: 2800 followers, the majority of whom are women between the ages of 35 and 54. 50% of the audience live in Ringwood, and the rest mostly from other local towns). There have been 19,000 post reaches in the last 90 days, with the most popular posts being lost property (due to the number of shares) and good news stories.

The Clubhouse & Events Manager updated on the following:

Winter Wonderland Facebook page: 2500 followers, with more of them being from outside Ringwood.

Carvers Clubhouse Facebook page: 1400 followers.

The majority of followers (90%) of both pages are women.

Town Council Instagram: 750 followers – this media is more targeted at businesses but is currently little used by the Council.

ACTION: Deputy Town Clerk to share link to Google Analytics and Cllr Swyer to advise on how to improve data available, including removing officer email addresses to give a more accurate number of hits.

5. SWOT ANALYSIS (STEP 3)

The Chairman had produced an initial SWOT analysis (*Annex B*) based on the results of the internal survey. It was noted external factors should also be taken into consideration.

Additional opportunities and threats were identified as follows:

Opportunities

- Broaden the focus on media currently used - make better use of other forms of communications, such as press releases, newsletters (paper, web and email) and noticeboards;
- Make more use of Gateway and Clubhouse where there is already good footfall;
- Expand on community collaboration, in particular to reach the older population, using churches, clubs, library etc. Review Greyfriars targeted communications to a similar audience;
- Be aware of the difference between push (getting information out) and pull (having information available for people to find themselves).

Threats

- Budget pressures (RTC, NFDC and HCC);
- Expectations for immediate response to social media posts
- Be aware of time sensitivity of social media platforms;
- Social media not used by many young or elderly people;
- Current communications only being used by a small demographic.

ACTION: Cllrs Swyer and DeBoos to update SWOT analysis and circulate for comment prior to next meeting.

It was noted that the next two steps are 4. Consider your council's objectives and develop SMART communications objectives, and 5. Consider your council's messages for different audiences, communications activities, as well as positioning and tone.

It was agreed that objectives should be linked to the Council Strategy, and also to everyday activities and business carried out by each committee.

ACTION: Town Clerk and Clubhouse & Events Manager to work on structure of objectives, for consideration at the next meeting.

It was agreed that the objectives should be signed off by Full Council before proceeding to Step 5. Also, that notes of these meetings should be received by Full Council.

ACTION: Deputy Town Clerk to include items on the agenda for Full Council in January (to receive notes of meetings held on 31 October and 16 January) and February (to consider Communications Plan objectives).

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

2pm, Tuesday 6 February in Teams.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 3.00pm.

RECEIVED
31 January 2024

APPROVED

TOWN MAYOR

WORKING PARTY CHAIRMAN

RTC Councillor and Staff Communications Survey – November 2023

Total responses: 9

Summary of Responses

What has worked well in the past?

- Publicising events and ticket sales
- New RTC website (regularly receive messages via contact page)
- Large posters around town
- Christmas shopping articles (written professionally and paid for) – 10 reasons to shop locally; town re-opening after road works
- Jay Cox videos of events
- Noticeboards
- Posters in Reception
- Facebook posts, especially good news ones (e.g. new memorial bench), and those shared directly to Ringwood page (posts are automatically approved)
- Face to face service provided by Information Officers
- Press Releases are usually picked up by local press
- Articles in R&F News
- Use of small interview room at Gateway

What hasn't worked so well?

- Consistency/frequency in updating website and Facebook
- Internal communication
- Some councillors less engaged than others
- Letting people know who/where we are and what we do
- Communicating/engaging with young people
- Public not aware of decisions being considered
- Monitoring of Facebook messages
- Publicity often an afterthought
- Little use of Instagram account
- No clear guidelines on what to share on Facebook
- Staff don't have sufficient time/resources/training

What do you feel we do really well right now?

- Approachable and friendly
- New RTC website
- Timely responses to emails/messages
- Weekly Bulletins
- Events
- Information Service
- Distribution Lists for Cllrs/Staff/Press
- Office staff flexibility
- Cllr email addresses

What do you think we can improve?

- Gateway opening hours (more user friendly for working people)
- Engagement with local businesses
- Better use of website (e.g. did you know blogs, links to National days for content)
- Monthly staff meeting for all staff to exchange information/views
- Internal communications – including better engagement with Clubhouse staff
- Modernising communications – keeping up with trends – new social media platforms, chat groups, use of Whatsapp etc.
- Make better use of Instagram
- Facebook page for allotment tenants
- Being more proactive – think about communication before decisions are made/projects commenced (include item on agendas / reports)
- Keeping websites up to date
- Production of regular newsletter – email and/or R&F News
- Capturing email addresses for residents/businesses to keep them updated with Council news
- Share good news stories / project updates
- Promote information / signposting service – we're here to help and inform
- Increase cross posting on Facebook (Carvers/Events to RTC page)
- Training for staff on use of Facebook / Google Analytics / creating engaging content etc.
- Better use/availability of software to create content
- Better use of Teams and other Microsoft 365 features
- Understanding of acceptable content for website and social media

Is there anything we should stop doing?

- Facebook posts without photos/images (no one sees them)
- Reduce need for some elements of work to free up officer time for more meaningful issues

Do you have any other comments?

- Is there scope to work creatively/dynamically with other organisations in the town (e.g. Greyfriars, The Barn)
- Moving towards lone-working on the front desk could free up staff time to possibly extend Gateway opening hours and/or devote more time to improving communications

Full Responses

What has worked well in the past? (for example a well publicised event, social media post that took off)
Well publicised event newspaper flyers etc not just on facebook
The Events seem to be promoted well. Local people seem to be aware of the events and there is good promotion around the town both via social media and poster sites etc
Facebook, notice board and posters at front desk all work well.
I find that when you set up events on facebook (rather than posts) they tend to get better engagement. I find that for our large events, the engagement goes up when the big posters go up round town, its like it reminds people of something that they have seen online. Better now that all managers share information at our meetings as before I didnt really know much about for example the football project or neighbourhood plan. Think the carvers consultation had a good response and reached some non-typical users of carvers (but not all, see below) we got brilliant engagement when we had the christmas shopping articles in the last two years, i expect helped because they were written professionally. One was called 10 reasons to shop locally this Christmas and the other was about the town re-opening after the road works. I know its a bit of a sticky situation with spending town council money on promoting business activity in the town centre which is why we used event income but there are benefits on raising the town council's profile too I would have thought? jay coxs videos get viewed hundreds of views after the event. Helps to promote future events.
I think the face-to-face service provided by the Information Officers is highly valued by users and the I/Os do it particularly well. We seem to get a good response from the local press when we issue press releases. Our advertising for events seems pretty effective. Our engagement with residents about major planning applications (and proposals like the A31 works) and the Neighbourhood Plan has given plenty of people the opportunity to have their say.
Facebook page - word of mouth - posters
Email, adverts in local paper, Facebook communications to local residents.
-Facebook post to get messages out at short notice - eg Gateway closed at lunchtime -Advertising events and ticket sales -Memorial bench "good news" post on FB got 115 reactions and 9 comments and 10 shares - there is a public appreciation for what the Town Council does. -Allowing access to the small room in reception for people to speak privately with NFDC or use internet for Council business
When issues are of real interest to lots of people, they will engage - e.g. events, A31 improvements, major planning applications - a post on Facebook, sign on our noticeboard or in Reception, details on our website or advert in the R&F News have all been successful. Sharing Facebook posts direct to Ringwood page (our posts are automatically approved) increases views and engagement. New RTC website seems to be working well - we receive regular messages through the contact us page.
What hasn't worked so well?
When website and social media do not match
Many of my local friends and family did not know there was a council building in Ringwood before i started working here and lots of customers who come in for the first time, are not aware of the services we offer so I think some work could be done around that.

I also feel that some of the councillors are less engaged and perhaps do not read their emails as often as they should. I am often chasing for a response on items.

communication with each other and between staff

I don't know what our response rate was like but things like the neighbourhood plan consultation didn't look busy (drop in) which is a shame as a lot of effort went into it. We are still not very good at telling people what we do, difficult as not a core part of anyone's job.

Year 7s at Ringwood School didn't know about Carvers Consultation. Perpetual issue of how we communicate with young people in particular. Last year we ran an activity day at Carvers and asked young people how we should tell them about our events and they said their parents tell them what to do and where to go. So perhaps we should have asked parents to ask their children or use local youth groups?

Although we have improved our website and used Facebook as much as staff time has allowed, these have not generated the traffic and level of engagement that they might. I'm also aware of decisions taken at meetings which have generated public objections afterwards (once it is too late) - despite the statutory publicity having been given, they do not seem to come sufficiently to public attention in time. Engaging young people is a significant weakness following the demise of the Student Advisor Scheme.

Monitoring of FB messages - but now a note to say it's not frequently monitored
Getting views of Cllrs as sometimes can't act without their input.

Publicity is often an after thought.

Adding new content to the website and posting on Facebook is sporadic and not structured - usually dependent on workload and availability of information.

We have an Instagram account, but it is rarely used.

It's easier to add content if information is readily available - takes longer if creativity is required (such as writing interesting copy/sourcing and/or taking photos or other media).

Sometimes unable to respond in a timely manner to queries that come via the website (via the contact form) or Facebook - we don't work weekends!

We don't always know whether we should respond to questions on Facebook posts - the default is not to comment, but sometimes it would be helpful if we could. This is time sensitive though.

Only a few officers have ability to update Facebook - less activity when key people on leave.

What do you feel we do really well right now?

Being approachable and friendly

New website looks good and is easy for the user to navigate.

We are very good at responding to enquires. I think our turn around rate with emails and messages is very quick and efficient

the weekly bulletins are useful

a lot of people come to our established events so that must be working

i think using teams as quick messaging is much better than emails. i have whats app groups as well with event team and clubhouse staff - not that I am trying to circumnavigate formal, recorded methods of comms but that sometimes a quick response is what's needed!

website is so much better than what we had b4

The Information Service. Commenting on planning matters.

I think we get all our events out there and are well communicated to our residents

I like the excel emails.

Quick response to most approaches (in person, telephone, email, post)

Correspondence via email is instant, but follow up with a letter when important eg. payments

Circulation lists for agendas / minutes / weekly bulletin
 Quick referrals to NFDC Homelessness triage team
 Office staff flexibility so customer service levels don't drop when staff absence
 Cllr email accounts to give consistent use of official accounts for Council business

Face to face service on Information Desk.

Publicity for events.

RTC website.

What do you think we can improve?

Opening hours at The Gateway are not always user friendly to working people

Make better use of the website - EG. promotion through blogs etc. We could use this to engage more with the local business/sponsors. EG. A blog on best places to go for a coffee in town, Did you know pieces. Shopping Experiences etc. You could link into National Days for content - <https://www.calendarr.com/united-kingdom/observances-2023/>

a monthly all staff meeting for people to exchange views, ideas both good and bad

I wonder whether we ought to look at the yearly calendar of events and see how we can use them to communicate (specifically something like consultations) rather than try and consult as a stand alone activity

I think our internal comms could be improved. The fact that we are a small, remote team of part time workers makes it very difficult to communicate. Still dont think the clubhouse team feel part of the RTC staff team and if people come in and ask them a question about town council they wouldnt know

I get driven mad by people asking questions on social media that are already on the event page or our website, i will reflect on how I can change that

we need to think about modernising our comms, new social media platforms etc, chat groups.

we had dozens of fake posts put up on all our fb posts this weekend.

i think comms is an add on sometimes to our projects or work. does it need to be added to agendas etc so it is thought about up front?

we have budget for comms tools, but not anyone to communicate with -for example a website but we are all too busy doing what we do to remember to communicate that we have done it.

should we be using things like whats app more widely- i wanted to send kelv a photo the other day of a gate post but ended up emailing it over later because I get charged to send a photo via text message

i know the clubhouse website gets out of date at times- i tend to prioritise (rightly or wrongly) social media over the website if pushed for time as i dont know the stats on how many people look at our website.

Use of website and social media (if given the resources). Production of a newsletter (to be distributed via the R&F News perhaps - I think we should start small, maybe quarterly, and build up to something more frequent if the reaction is favourable and resources allow).

Letting people know the good things the Council does. Give the projects a better profile.

People usually approach the Council when they want / need something or to complain. It's always negative, so maybe promoting as an information / signposting service more. Here to help and inform, not just to solve their problems.

Share more good news stories.

Tell people more about what we are doing and what services we provide. Flag up issues that are going to be discussed by committees/decisions made.

Increase number of press releases.

Make more use of Instagram - a better way to engage businesses?

Cross posting on Facebook - sharing more Carvers/Events posts to RTC page?

Set up Facebook page for allotment tenants?

Training for staff on Facebook (how it works!), creating engaging content etc.
 Better use/availability of software to create content.
 Regular email newsletter.
 Understanding of acceptable content for website and Facebook - it has previously been agreed that the website should be for RTC information only - it's difficult to know what to share and what not to share on Facebook, as this is not always consistent.
 Better use of Teams and other Microsoft 365 features - training required.

Is there anything we should stop doing?

No

Not that I can think of....

Putting FB posts up without a pic, I dont think anyone sees them !

We could reduce the number of Charmaine's reports to RLOS to 2 per year and decide that PT&E commenting on things like tree applications, licensing applications and other bits and bobs adds little or no value and wastes officer time that could be better spent on other things.

Do you have any other comments?

Engaging with young people is not really working not the councils fault

none of the staff are comms experts nor employed to be so, thats not a criticism just a fact! So of course we are going to be chasing our tails a bit on this. It would also probably be seen as a vanity exercise if we had someone who was so cant win!

One thing that does strike me is that many organisations in the town are fighting to get thier messages out there- greyfriars, the barn, other events. I wonder if theres a way to join up creatively/dynamically

Moving towards lone-working on the front desk could free up significant staff time - this could enable us to re-open on Tuesdays or put more effort into improving communications (maybe even both) - but at some cost to the speed and quality of the Info Service. We would benefit from training staff in the skills needed for writing engaging posts, newsletters, press releases, etc.

Just to note that staff who use Facebook on behalf of the Council do so on their personal devices outside of office hours, as well as during office hours. We can choose to ignore notifications we receive, but don't always do that!

Ringwood Town Council – Communications SWOT Analysis (based on results of councillor and staff survey)

Strengths

Effective Event Promotion

- Successful publicising of events and ticket sales.
“I find that when you set up events on Facebook (rather than posts) they tend to get better engagement.”
- Large posters around town for increased visibility.
- Importance of non-digital communications.

Digital Presence

- New RTC website with regular messages received via the contact page.
“Website is so much better than what we had before”
- Utilisation of Facebook for positive news, especially those shared directly to the Ringwood page.

Media Engagement

- Press releases consistently picked up by local press.
- Articles in R&F News contributing to community engagement.
“There is a public appreciation for what the Town Council does.”

Face-to-Face Interaction

- Approachable and friendly face-to-face service provided by Information Officers.
“I think the face-to-face service provided by the Information Officers is highly valued by users and the I/Os do it particularly well.”
- Successful use of the small interview room at Gateway.

Quality of service

- Quick response times.
“We are very good at responding to enquiries. I think our turnaround rate with emails and messages is very quick and efficient.”

Weaknesses

Limited Outreach

- Challenges in letting people know who/where the council is and what it does.
“Many of my local friends and family did not know there was a council building in Ringwood and lots of customers who come in for the first time, are not aware of the services we offer.”
- Ineffective communication/engagement with young people.
“Engaging young people is a significant weakness following the demise of the Student Advisor Scheme.”

Social Media Underutilisation

- Little use of Instagram and no clear strategy for its use.
- Inconsistency in updating the website and Facebook.
“Adding new content to the website and posting on Facebook is sporadic and not structured - usually dependent on workload and availability of information.”
- Lack of clear guidelines on what to share or respond to on Facebook.
“We don't always know whether we should respond to questions on Facebook posts - the default is not to comment, but sometimes it would be helpful if we could.”

Resource and Training Gaps

- Insufficient time, resources, and training for staff.
- Facebook is unmanned at weekends and is reliant on staff working out of hours.
“Staff who use Facebook on behalf of the Council do so on their personal devices outside of office hours, as well as during office hours.”

Internal Communication Challenges

- Issues with internal communication and engagement, including some councillors being less involved.

Opportunities

Improved Internal Communication and Planning

- Taking a more planned approach to communication.
“We ought to look at the yearly calendar of events and see how we can use them to communicate.”
- Implementation of monthly staff meetings for information exchange.
- Better engagement with Clubhouse staff.
- Training to ensure better use of Teams and Microsoft 365.

Positive Communications

- Sharing the good work the Council does.
- Helping and informing people before they need it.
“People usually approach the Council when they want / need something or to complain. It's always negative, so maybe promoting as an information / signposting service more. Here to help and inform, not just to solve their problems.”

Modernisation of Communication

- Adapting to new trends, social media platforms, and communication tools (e.g., WhatsApp, Instagram, chat groups).
“Make more use of Instagram - a better way to engage businesses?”

Expansion of Services

- Expanding Gateway opening hours to be more user-friendly for working people.

Community Collaboration

- Exploring dynamic collaborations with other organisations and venues in the town (Greyfriars, The Barn etc).

Enhanced Website Utilisation

- Better use of the website, including informative blogs and links to national days for content.

Threats

Time and Resource Constraints

- Limited time and resources impacting the ability to keep websites up to date and engage in meaningful communication.
- Need to reduce some elements of work to free up officer time for more critical issues.

Technological Gaps

- Lack of understanding and training in using Facebook, Google Analytics, and creating engaging content.

Content Quality

- Posting on Facebook without photos/images, leading to reduced visibility.

TOWN COUNCIL – 31st JANUARY 2024
BUDGET 2024/2025

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** Policy & Finance Committee members considered a draft budget for 2024/25 at their meetings in November and December. The Committee recommended several changes which have been incorporated into this draft budget which was endorsed at the January meeting. This report sets out the revised proposals for the 2024/25 budget and consequent Precept and Council Tax for approval by Full Council.
- 1.2** This report also includes an update to the revised budget for 2023/24.
- 1.3** Attached for the Committee's consideration are the following documents:-
- Appendix A – Draft summary Council budget, including actual spend 2020/21 to 2022/23, original and revised budgets 2023/24 and revised draft proposals for 2024/25.
 - Appendix B – Provisions at 1st April 2023, and estimated balances at 31st March 2024 and 2025, based on the revised budget 2023/24 and the updated proposals for 2024/25.
 - Appendix C – Summary of budget preparation assumptions, movements and balances.

2. REVISED BUDGET 2023/24

- 2.1** In December, it was reported that there is likely to be a budget deficit of £8,000 by year end mainly as a result of the lower than anticipated cemetery income.
- 2.2** There have been some further developments in the current year. Now that the events activity has finished for the year, an analysis of income and expenditure has revealed somewhat better outturn although any surplus is retained in the events reserve and does not directly benefit the general fund.
- 2.3** There are some changes in predicted capital expenditure but as this is all funded through reserves, grants and other sources of income, these will have no net impact on the general fund.
- 2.4** The budget deficit in 2023/24 is now predicted to be less than £4,000 halving the figure predicted in December. Earmarked reserves are predicted to decrease mainly because of the football development project which is expected to be substantially complete by year end.
- 2.5** Reserves at the start of the year, including key and rent deposits, amounted to £634,461. (£259,040 General reserve, £357,258 earmarked reserves and £18,163 key and rent deposits). The general reserve was reduced by £5,696 during the year following the creation of an open spaces security measures reserve and the application of some reserved funds which were being held in the general reserve. The predicted budget deficit for the year will deplete the general reserve by a further £3,989, leaving a balance at March 2024 of £249,335. Earmarked reserves, despite contributions and receipts of £568,061, are nevertheless predicted to reduce by £5,757 but note that the actual balance will depend on the performance of those projects which are being funded from reserves.
- 2.6** Planned and predicted movements on reserves are detailed in Appendix B.

3. DRAFT BUDGET 2024/25

- 3.1** The draft budget has been prepared, initially, on an incremental basis. The original budget for 2023/24 has been adjusted for known and unavoidable changes, any one off items approved for the current year have been removed and a modest range of estimates for inflation have been applied. Inflation rose very slightly in December but is still expected to fall during 2024. Note that some cost increases in 2023/24 were greater than predicted in the 2023/24 budget and some catch up has been necessary.
- 3.2** Following the December meeting, the pay inflation assumption was reduced from 4.5% for the year to 3.9%. This reduces the budget requirement by £3,300. Further, following a very successful year for Ringwood Events, the events reserve is in a position to reinstate the annual contribution towards the Town Christmas tree, further reducing the budget requirement by £3,000.
- 3.3** Cemetery income has declined over the last two years and the original budget plans included a reduction of £4,500 for 2024/25. However, continuing reductions in income suggest that the planned receipts for 2024/25 remain too optimistic. For this reason, the planned income has been reduced by a further £2,000 (making the total year on year reduction £6,500).
- 3.4** These adjustments together with a small number of other minor adjustments have reduced the budget requirement by £4,000 which in turn will reduce the Council Tax by 0.6%.
- 3.5** The council Tax base was anticipated to increase by 0.14% which was the assumption adopted by NFDC in their budget calculations. However, the increase for Ringwood has now been confirmed at 0.488% and whilst this increase doesn't affect the budget requirement, it does reduce the Council Tax by almost 0.4%.
- 3.6** The combined impact of these changes is that a Council Tax increase of 4.91% will be required in order to achieve a balanced budget without drawing on reserves. The wider budget assumptions are included in Appendix C.
- 3.7** The proposed base expenditure budget, after allowing for adjustments and unavoidable inflation, is £1,159,243. Income is predicted to be £466,132 resulting in a base net budget of £693,111. Net transfers from reserves reduce the budget requirement to £643,525 before any new bids are considered.
- 3.8** There are no new bids for consideration in the draft budget, but there remains some residual spend on the Football project. The budget plans summarised above include expenditure of £235,000 and income of £153,633 in respect of the project, along with a transfer of the balance held in earmarked reserves of £81,367. These figures are entirely dependent on progress during the last quarter of the current year but any slippage will not impact the revenue account.
- 3.9** Reserves movements are summarised in appendix B. The opening balance on earmarked reserves is expected to be £351,501 whilst budgeted transfers to reserves will increase this by £45,100. Transfers to the revenue budget from reserves amount to £7,278 whilst a further £87,407 will be used to support capital projects during the year (including some replacement plant and equipment). This means that the predicted balance of earmarked reserves at 31st March 2025 will be £301,915. The budget proposals set out here would therefore result in a net reduction in total reserves of £49,586 in 2024/25, before any unplanned expenditure that may necessitate an additional transfer from reserves. At this stage it is impossible to predict the level of CIL receipts that might be expected, but these too will be added to earmarked reserves. The General reserve is expected to be maintained at £250,000.

- 3.9 The base budget and precept will therefore be £643,525. The proposed budget will result in an increase in the precept of £33,096 or 5.42%. However, the increase in the Council Tax base will limit the increase in Council tax to 4.91% resulting in a band D equivalent council Tax of £116.97. This represents an increase of £5.47 per annum.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The proposed budget, including the new bids, requires an increase in the Council tax of 4.91% in order to achieve a balanced budget.
- 4.2 Many of the individual budgets have been shaved, frozen or cut for the last few years and there is consequently an increasing risk that the overall budget is vulnerable to any unexpected pressures. This may result in an increased reliance on the General Reserve to meet unexpected costs or cost increases. The general Reserve balance is expected to be around £250,000 or 39% of the precept.
- 4.3 Similarly, the transfer of some "irregular" spend from the budget will also place a greater reliance on Earmarked Reserves to meet unplanned expenditure such as building repairs, legal fees, vandalism and so on. Further consideration will need to be given to whether the current approach to building and maintaining earmarked reserves is sufficient to meet future needs.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 Subject to any amendments made at this meeting, **it is recommended that:-**
- 5.2 Members approve the draft budget.
- 5.3 Members approve a precept of £643,525 and consequent 4.91% increase in the Council Tax which will take the Band D equivalent Council Tax contribution for the Town Council to £116.97.

For any further information, please contact:

Rory Fitzgerald	or	Chris Wilkins
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RINGWOOD TOWN COUNCIL
BUDGET AND REVISED BUDGET 2023/24 AND
DRAFT BUDGET 2024/25

1	2	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
	Committee	Actual 20/21 £	Actual 21/22 £	Actual 22/23 £	Budget 23/24 £	Revised 23/24 £	Inflation £	Known Changes* £	Budget 24/25 £
	Policy & Finance								
	Expenditure	333,478	346,301	411,888	391,214	438,249	14,019	11,595	418,378
	Income	-120,533	-118,043	-133,528	-134,996	-206,065	-4,102	-46,413	-185,511
	Net Expenditure	212,945	228,258	278,360	256,219	232,184	9,917	-34,818	232,867
	Transfers to Reserves	14,000	16,900	14,000	10,700	10,700	0	4,000	14,700
	Transfers from Reserves	-6,146	-1,732	-37,841	-750	-14,292	0	0	-3,000
	Growth bids and adjustments (net of transfers from reserves and income)								0
	Committee net expenditure	220,799	243,426	254,519	266,169	228,592	9,917	-30,818	244,567
	Recreation & Leisure								
	Expenditure	219,923	244,177	1,069,677	1,007,770	2,344,495	9,210	-545,540	482,427
	Income	-33,984	-38,289	-517,390	-689,588	-1,586,510	-543	509,432	-180,700
	Net Expenditure	185,939	205,888	552,287	318,182	757,985	8,667	-36,108	301,727
	Transfers to Reserves	17,900	27,452	17,900	17,900	17,900	0	9,000	26,900
	Transfers from Reserves	-14,654	-33,684	-365,598	-139,830	-551,375	0	0	-87,407
	Growth bids and adjustments (net of transfers from reserves and income)								0
	Committee net expenditure	189,185	199,656	204,589	196,252	224,510	8,667	-27,108	241,220
	Events								
	Expenditure	6,679	17,892	51,702	37,908	37,053	783	0	40,048
	Income	-3,085	-32,425	-35,311	-28,000	-41,386	0	0	-28,000
	Net Expenditure	3,594	-14,533	16,391	9,908	-4,333	783	0	12,048
	Transfers to Reserves	0	7,940	0	0	14,333	0	0	0
	Transfers from Reserves	-4,529	0	-10,823	0	0	0	0	-2,048
	Growth bids and adjustments (net of transfers from reserves and income)								0
	Committee net expenditure	-935	-6,593	5,568	9,908	10,000	783	0	10,000
	Cemeteries								
	Expenditure	42,913	51,123	63,343	66,254	65,157	2,696	-1,920	68,802
	Income	-36,240	-51,314	-41,041	-44,512	-31,182	-2,040	8,768	-37,922
	Net Expenditure	6,673	-191	22,302	21,742	33,975	655	6,848	30,880
	Transfers to Reserves	4,000	4,000	2,500	2,500	2,500	0	0	1,000
	Transfers from Reserves	-230	-5,141	-230	-230	-230	0	0	-230
	Growth bids and adjustments (net of transfers from reserves and income)								0
	Committee net expenditure	10,443	-1,332	24,572	24,012	36,245	655	6,848	31,650
	Allotments								
	Expenditure	11,725	13,246	19,577	21,408	22,850	876	0	22,843
	Income	-5,374	-5,585	-5,954	-6,012	-6,875	-301	-87	-6,400
	Net Expenditure	6,351	7,661	13,623	15,396	15,975	575	-87	16,444
	Transfers to Reserves	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Transfers from Reserves	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Growth bids and adjustments (net of transfers from reserves and income)								0
	Committee net expenditure	6,351	7,661	13,623	15,396	15,975	575	-87	16,444
	Carvers Clubhouse								
	Expenditure	57,346	83,005	100,991	95,801	98,737	0	0	96,456
	Income	-3,494	-23,123	-26,274	-25,273	-27,500	0	0	-26,500
	Net Expenditure	53,852	59,882	74,717	70,528	71,237	0	0	69,956
	Transfers to Reserves	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	0	0	2,500
	Transfers from Reserves	-2,026	0	-2,841	-1,000	-1,546	0	0	-1,000
	Growth bids and adjustments (net of transfers from reserves and income)								0
	Committee net expenditure	54,326	62,382	74,376	72,028	72,191	0	0	71,456
	Planning, Town & Environment								
	Expenditure	25,600	32,964	37,993	28,862	34,380	1,176	0	30,289
	Income	-9,225	-16,299	-5,850	-1,100	-1,100	0	0	-1,100
	Net Expenditure	16,375	16,665	32,143	27,762	33,280	1,176	0	29,189
	Transfers to Reserves	0	3,473	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Transfers from Reserves	-1,120	-450	-6,016	-1,000	-6,280	0	0	-1,000
	Growth bids and adjustments (net of transfers from reserves and income)								0
	Committee net expenditure	15,255	19,688	26,127	26,762	27,000	1,176	0	28,189

RINGWOOD TOWN COUNCIL
 BUDGET AND REVISED BUDGET 2023/24 AND
 DRAFT BUDGET 2024/25

Total Base Expenditure	697,664	788,708	1,755,171	1,649,217	3,040,921	1,159,243
Total Income	-211,934	-285,078	-765,348	-929,481	-1,900,618	-466,132
Total transfer to reserves	38,400	62,265	36,900	33,600	47,933	45,100
Total Transfer from reserves	-28,705	-41,007	-423,349	-142,810	-573,723	-94,685
Total New Bids						0
Less funded from earmarked reserves						0
Total Budget Requirement	495,424	524,888	603,374	610,526	614,513	643,525
Precept	497,549	519,907	553,949	610,429	610,429	643,525
Covid Relief grant		4,071	4,071	95	95	0
Transfer to/-from General Reserve	2,125	-910	-45,354	-2	-3,989	0

RESERVES AND PROVISIONS - MOVEMENT & ESTIMATED BALANCES
1st April 2023 to 31st March 2025

	Actual Balance 01/04/22 £	Transfers 2023/24 :				Balance 01/04/24 £	Planned and Proposed Movements 2024/25:					Estimated Balance 31/03/25 £
		from Revenue £	to Revenue £	Cash Receipts £	between provisions £		from Revenue £	to revenue		Capital & Other Receipts £	between provisions £	
								base budget £	Growth £			
<u>EARMARKED PROVISIONS</u>												
I.T. & Equipment	22,900	2,700	0			25,600	2,700		0			28,300
Gateway	25,000	0	0			25,000	0		0			25,000
Cemetery	23,533	2,500	-17,000			9,033	1,000		0			10,033
Buildings Reserve	36,667	4,000	-750			39,917	5,500	0	0			45,417
Election	12,542	1,000	-13,542			0	5,000		0			5,000
Vehicle & Machinery	33,572	11,000	-16,689			27,883	20,000		-6,040			41,843
Play Equipment	8,716	6,900				15,616	6,900		0			22,516
Memorials	0	0	0			0	0		0			0
Christmas Lights	0	0	0			0	0		0			0
Carvers Clubhouse	29,682	2,500	-1,000			31,182	1,000	-1,000	0			31,182
Ringwood Events	811	14,333				15,144	0	-5,048				10,096
Memorial Lantern	1,161	0	-1,536	375		0	0		0			0
Carvers Grounds	4,363	0	-1,050			3,313	0		0			3,313
Carvers Sheds feasibility	4,000		-1,000			3,000						3,000
Infrastructure & Open Spaces	15,370	3,000				18,370	3,000		0			21,370
Open Space Security Measures	0		-100		1,500	1,400						1,400
Neighbourhood Plan	1,227	0	-4,700		3,650	177	0		0			177
Football development Project	81,542	0	-175			81,367	0		-81,367			0
Budget Underspend retained for use in 2022/23*	1,290	0				1,290	0	0				1,290
Total Provisions	302,377	47,933	-57,542	375	5,150	298,293	45,100	-6,048	-87,407	0	0	249,937
<u>RESERVES</u>												
Earmarked Reserves:												
Dev Contribs	5,560		-1,000	10,000		14,560		-1,000	0			13,560
Cem Maint	750		-230			520		-230	0	0		290
Dev Cons(CIL)	25,293		-14,580	4,232		14,945						14,945
Capital Receipts	18,942			0		18,942			0	0		18,942
Grants Unapplied	4,335		-641		546	4,240		0	0	0		4,240
Loans Unapplied	0		-499,825	499,825		0			0	0		0
Total Earmarked Reserves and Provisions	357,258	47,933	-573,818	514,432	5,696	351,501	45,100	-7,278	-87,407	0	0	301,915
General Reserve	259,040		-3,989		-5,696	249,355	0	0			0	249,355
Key & Rent Deposits	18,163		-150	600		18,613						18,613
Total Reserves & Customer Deposits	634,461	47,933	-577,957	515,032	0	619,469	45,100	-7,278	-87,407	0	0	569,883

BUDGET ASSUMPTIONS 2024/25

Inflation (RPI) is currently running at 6.1% (for the year to October 2023 down from 8.9% in September. CPIH is 4.7% for the same period whilst the CPI is 4.6%, (down from 6.3% and 6.7% respectively in September).

Note that some costs and expenditure are linked to inflation, whereas some "non contractual" expenditure is more discretionary and inflationary cost increases may be absorbed by reducing spend, although this may not be without consequence. Other expenditure may be fixed with no inflationary adjustment required. Each expenditure component in the budget has been allocated an inflation type (1-6) which may be modelled on this page.

ASSUMPTIONS:

1 Inflation

	%	Type
- Pay	3.9%	1
- Utilities	7.0%	2
- Other Expenditure	5.0%	3
- Non contractual expenditure	4.0%	4
- Income	5.0%	5
- Fixed expenditure (i.e. no inflation)	0.0%	6

2 Council Tax Base increase

	0.49%
Note, the Council Tax base for 2023/24 is	5,474.9

An increase of 0.49% (assumption 2) will increase the Council Tax base to:

5,501.6

3 Use of General Reserve

	£
Use of "Covid Relief" and "Opening of High Street Safely" grant	0
	0

The General Reserve is expected to be £249,355 at April 1st 2024. This transfer will reduce it to £249,355 by March 2025

The balance of this grant available at 31st March 2025 would then be £4,240

Net Budget Requirement and consequent Band D equivalent Council Tax

	£
Based on the above assumptions together with any proposed new bids and adjustments:	
Base Budget 2024/2025	693,110
Net transfers to/from earmarked reserves	-49,585
Growth Bids & Adjustments	0
- Less funded from earmarked reserves (inc. borrowing)	0
- Less additional income generated	0
Net Budget requirement	643,525
Less funded from general reserve/Covid relief Grant	0
Sum to be funded from Council Tax Payers (Precept)	643,525

Band D equivalent Council Tax 2024/25

116.97

The budget requirement and resulting precept, as modelled, represents an increase of 4.91 % in the Council Tax

The Council Tax for 2023/24 is £111.50 per Band D Equivalent

The Band D equivalent Council Tax for 2023/24 is: **111.5**

A target Council Tax increase of : **4.9%**
would increase the Council Tax to: **116.96**

And require an additional transfer from reserves of: **£37**
which would reduce the general reserve to £ 249,318 by March 2023
(given the assumptions in 1 - 3 on the left) or 38.7% of the annual precept

Summary movement on reserves:

Opening reserves 1/4/2024:	£
General Reserve	249,355
Earmarked Reserves & Provisions	351,501
Total Reserves 1/4/2024	600,856
Planned transfers in	45,100
Planned transfers out	-94,685

Plus Capital Receipts 24/25 0
Less Funding for growth 0
Less use of general reserve 0

Predicted reserves 31/3/2025 :

General Reserve	249,355
Earmarked Reserves	301,915
Predicted Reserves 31/3/2024	551,270
(nb excludes rent & key deposits)	

An increase of one percent on the Council Tax will generate an increased precept of : £6,134
For each increase of £1,000 in the precept requirement, a further £0.182 will be added to the Band D Council Tax