

WIMBORNE MINSTER TOWN COUNCIL

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Author:

Cllr Mrs Kelly Webb (Chairman)

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1. INTRODUCTION

Two distinct issues have been raised with EDDC Cabinet Committee during 2018 with regards to the future direction of WMTC once the district council ceases to exist. These are;

- 1 The desire to make a case to the Shadow Authority regarding the 'package' of community assets put forward to EDDC which included selected Wimborne Minster town centre car parks with an annual income equal to the expenditure required to maintain specific other community assets requested. Such assets included many of those 'offered' to WMTC by EDDC but also included two key community buildings. The package was 'cost neutral' to the new authority.
- 2 The position of Wimborne Minster as a 'hub' town with a very restricted tax base (and a particularly small percentage of Band D properties). This particular situation may apply to other towns within Dorset and indeed special consideration may be being given to them as a result. WMTC would like to make the case that Wimborne Minster should be treated differently due to the nature of the town and the dependency on it from the wider rural area.

Regarding point 1, EDDC were keen to discuss the matter with the Shadow Authority in the first instance as the assets belonged to EDDC. There is an acceptance that the Shadow Authority is not in a position to make such decisions about assets still belonging to a sovereign council and the matter has not progressed due to other priorities within the LGR process.

However, the Town Council is looking to the future, particularly in relation to the large developments and the consequential additional land/recreation area responsibilities that will pass to the Council. The 'package' previously put forward (as referenced in 1 above), that will support the growth and capability of the Town Council, is still very much on the table but it is understood that further discussions are unlikely to take place until the new authority is in place.

On that basis, for now, the focus must be on point 2 above and this paper sets out why and how WMTC would like financial support from EDDC to help with transition costs in the short term.

2. FINANCIAL BACKGROUND

There are approximately 7 market towns in Dorset that would be treated as a 'hub' town to the nearby rural areas. These are;

Wimborne Minster	Shaftesbury
Dorchester	Bridport
Blandford	Wareham
Lyme Regis	

There is also Ferndown which is another large town. Looking at their tax base and precepts does not really give the whole picture e.g. in terms of comparisons with Wimborne Minster - Ferndown has more than double the tax base of and charges almost half on Band D. Lyme Regis have a third less

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tax base and their precept is only a third of Wimborne Minster's – in the latter case, this is because their precept only equates (only needs to equate), to about 5% of their overall income due to income generating assets. To get the whole comparative picture, we would need to understand what recreational areas those Councils offer and maintain. I believe there are inconsistencies in the service provision from EDDC e.g. maintenance of play and recreational areas.

Some of our 'case' for special consideration is based on knowledge gained anecdotally through discussions with other Councils and knowledge directly from officers at EDDC. It is these discussions that led us to believe that our restricted tax base and huge town offering (including recreational areas), leaves us at a disadvantage to other key towns.

2.1 Tax Base

The tax base is approximately 3000 and £120 for a Band D property an obvious comparison is Colehill with also approximately 3000 tax base and Band D of £34.50 (and a much higher degree of high band properties). For all to see we are one conurbation but no ability to attract finance from Colehill (50% of the area that uses the town) or compel them to contribute to amenities their residents would benefit from. This argument also applies to some degree to all nearby rural villages and hamlets.

2.1.1 Ratio of bands

Ratio D	AA 5/9	A 6/9	B 7/9	C 8/9	D 9/9	E 11/9	F 13/9	G 15/9	H 18/9
Nos	0	82	486	798	573	600	298	130	9

With the numerous developments starting to take place in and around the town, the annual income will rise – estimates when all are complete, vary from £150-180k but it will take some years to be in that position, certainly not levelling out until end of year 5. This additional amount may be enough to take on the extra staff required to support the additional land area responsibilities.

In the meantime our position looks slightly worse since EDDC always assumed a collection rate of 99.5% and yet the Dorset Authority is only assuming 98%. This is a significant reduction and is offset by some of the new properties added this year (which had been assumed would be an enhancement to the precept), leaving us with a net loss of 0.3%.

3. WIDER SUPPORT THAT WMTC PROVIDES

WMTC provides significant sums to support local groups, organisations, charities, festivals, tourism, transport and events (including Christmas lighting and associated events). Much of this funding provides benefit to a much wider community than the small number of residents that pay a precept to WMTC. Our Grant budget for 2019 is being set at £40k.

A detailed piece of work can be done to provide an exhaustive list and precise funding amounts but to illustrate the point at this early opportunity, things that come to mind immediately are;

- Significant grants to TIC, CAB, (£7-8k each annually),
- Ongoing grants to community facilities such as Allendale House, Allendale Centre, Community Learning and Action Resource Centre.

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- Grants to community charities that service people outside of our immediate tax base e.g. Vision Wimborne, Dreamboats (for tourism), Dementia friendly etc.
- Christmas costs are largely shared 50/50 (close to £20kpa each) with Wimborne BID.
- Supporting the cost of a community bus to get people in and out of the town (also supported by Wimborne BID, Colehill Parish Council and Sturminster Marshall Parish Council.
- During the 'build' of the Colehill 'Reef' building, WMTC contributed approximately £35k to their project.

These grants/organisations, whilst providing huge benefits to the wider community do not always directly benefit the residents of the town e.g. the Museum/TIC is for the benefit of 'East Dorset' and only 9% of CAB 'customers' are from Wimborne Minster. Christmas lights and events are very much about tourism and supporting the local economy.

Small Parish Councils generally raise only enough precept to cover the costs of maintaining what they need to only for their immediate residents. There is often no or very little contribution to the nearby towns that provide the majority of facilities to the wider area.

Prior to 1999 the significance of the town's contribution had been previously recognised by EDDC with an annual community grant of between £10-15k to help support the additional funding required to maintain recreational and public areas used by the wider East Dorset residents.

EDDC have also provided other support over many years by way of help from specialist departments such as building design, engineering, graphics and IT. As EDDC evolved over time and this support withdrawn, the impact on the budget and resources of WMTC has been noticeable and whilst absorbed to this point, it is clear that the current levels of staffing and budgeting is not sustainable.

4. FUTURE GROWTH

EDDC offered a number of assets to WMTC to own and therefore cover the cost and maintenance of. Much of what was offered has been rejected since there is currently no spare resource or budget to take these on and without any progress on our 'proposal' referred to in the Introduction, there would be no additional ongoing income to finance additional assets.

However, even in rejecting those some assets offered, there are still additional areas that are likely to come under the ownership of WMTC e.g. amenity areas on the Cranfield Estate, SANGS on the new estates, the new sports village south off Leigh Rd, Riverside, land to the rear of Glassblowers. The estimated legal costs of transferring the ownership are £9k.

Due to the current workload of the Council and the known forthcoming changes, a number of projects are underway, these are;

1. A review of the committees and Member roles.
2. Review and upgrade ICT to enable mobile and home working and enhance efficiency e.g. reduce paper (software and hardware).
3. There are plans to re configure the office accommodation in order to grow the Admin team, including taking back the office currently rented to tenants (this has required a compensation payment in order for them to surrender the lease. There has been an urgency to this matter due to working conditions for staff). We will suffer an ongoing rental loss of approximately £4k pa.

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4. Refurbishing the Council Chamber to modernise it and enable more use of it by the community, potentially Dorset Authority area meetings and increase wedding revenue.
5. Renew 'mowing' equipment to enable maintenance of new parcels of land.
6. Recruit a part time receptionist/Admin assistant.
7. Plan for recruitment of an Operations Manager (external grounds team).

Compared to many other Town Councils of a similar size, WMTC are already known to be understaffed both in terms of Admin and Grounds staff and there will be a cost to staff up correctly even for the status quo, but certainly for the future.

Some specialist skills may be outside of our ability to afford e.g. Highways officers, Green space experts, buildings maintenance staff. There may be an opportunity for the new authority to employ these and various T&P Councils contribute to their costs for a number of hours per month designated to particular areas - a fair way to fund these specialist roles across T&P Councils.

4.1 Structure of WMTC

The size of the infrastructure that WMTC may take responsibility for in the near future and the scale of financial support likely to be required by local organisations moving forward, means that the Council cannot stand still. This has been understood for some time and various projects have been ongoing to best prepare for the future.

WMTC believes in localism and would certainly like to take responsibility for the town by owning and managing the various assets available but realistically the 'set up' both structurally and financially is not yet there to do this.

As mentioned above, projects are underway to realise efficiencies but there are limitations given the size of the officer team which is only just above 2 FTE.

A lot of Member time is being given to help drive this forward, this can be between 10-20hrs pw for key Members. It has been muted that sustaining this level of Member involvement may also see allowances revisited (yet another cost burden to the tax payer).

When considering just two additional staff that would be ideal at this point and taking into account other budgets that help to even out costs over years e.g. building renewal, ideally this year's budget would have risen by approximately 25%. Clearly this would be unpalatable and decisions have had to be made in order to reduce the impact on the taxpayer and various budgets have had to be cut. However there is still like to be at least an 3.22% increase to cover the minimum additional part timer required immediately.

4.2 Project Costs

Due to the changes we have planned, there are the following known costs in the short term;

1	Compensation payment to tenant to surrender lease of offices (provides space for up to 4 additional staff) – including legal costs.	£15500.00
2	Additional office furniture and decoration of above offices on release (1 st February 2019)	£2000.00

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3	Upgrading Council Chamber, including décor, furniture, IT and additional accessibility	£25000.00
4	Upgrade ICT, including hardware for Members	£23000.00
5	New 'Mower' – larger scale to make working more efficient, especially in relation to larger scale areas.	£25000.00
6	Legal costs for asset transfers	£9000.00
	TOTAL	£99,500.00

There are incidental costs not taken into account for these projects e.g. officer time to manage and liaise regarding legal agreements, quotes etc..

5. SUMMARY

- WMTC have been understaffed for some time and now needs to increase headcount.
- Significant developments in and around the town are placing additional responsibilities on the Town Council by way of green spaces and amenity areas to own and maintain.
- The tax base of Wimborne Minster is small but WMTC give approximately £40kpa in grants and maintain various recreational areas.
- Wimborne Minster is a hub town for nearby rural towns and villages yet receive no financial support from small T&P Councils.
- Some organisations supported do not (or hardly) directly benefit Wimborne Minster tax payers – but support the wider East Dorset residents.
- EDDC have gradually withdrawn financial support over the years that compensated for the town's position in East Dorset.
- EDDC due to evolution have stopped alternative types of support previously provided to WTMC which now has to be picked up by the officers of the Town Council or financed by outsourcing elsewhere.
- **WMTC would like to request financial support for the total sum of detailed projects in section 4.2, to help with the immediate known costs which are directly related either to LGR, previous EDDC changes and/or large scale developments in and around the town.**