

Town Clerk | Swaffham Town Council

From: Ian Pilcher <pilcherian@hotmail.com>
Sent: 26 March 2019 08:57
To: Town Clerk | Swaffham Town Council
Subject: Re: Meeting

Hello again, Mr Bishop

Thanks once again for clarification. Whatever decision is reached on the optimum use of Day's Field, my personal motivation is simply to try to result in the best returns for the people of Swaffham. In simple terms, that avoids capital risk but generates income stream, which can then support lifestyle benefits - Sports amenities as a prime example.

However, as you rightly advise, all possibilities will only be debated by the incoming Council and we have no idea of the make up of that. The permission to borrow would only be part of a project if the new Council sought that risky option and, as you say, could not do so without public approval. That is why I favour a formula without loan facilities. However, that's enough said for now. Let's see who and what transpires after the Elections.

Whatever my personal status after 2 May, I shall continue to follow this interest from the Public Forum at any Finance Meetings.

The people of Swaffham must also demonstrate due diligence on such an important matter, or accept whatever outcome is imposed by Councillors.

I must make sure my diary has availability on the due date!

Kind regards

Ian (Pilcher)

From: Town Clerk | Swaffham Town Council <townclerk@swaffhamtowncouncil.gov.uk>
Sent: 26 March 2019 08:04
To: Ian Pilcher
Subject: RE: Meeting

Dear Ian,

The Days Field issue as you are aware has been deferred to the incoming Council after May. I would envisage a brief item on either the June or July Full Council meeting agenda, with a more in depth discussion at the first Full Council Finance meeting in late July. The permission to borrow could progress independently if the Council wished, as it would only be used if the Council choose the option to develop the land themselves. However, there is a piece of work that is required prior to the loan application which involves a further consultation exercise. So, it may be best to get a steer from the new Council before this work commences, and likely that this would not be until after the Finance meeting in July, at this moment in time, nothing is set in stone.

Best regards,

Richard Bishop
Town Clerk



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From: Ian Pilcher <pilcherian@hotmail.com>

Sent: 25 March 2019 18:02

To: Town Clerk | Swaffham Town Council <townclerk@swaffhamtowncouncil.gov.uk>

Subject: Re: Meeting

Hello Mr Bishop

Once again, you have given much time and consideration to my correspondence and topics contained therein. I do appreciate your courtesy. I think you realise that my gripe is not with you or any individual personnel, but is more a scrutinising approach to budgets and costs incurred. Just a hang over from my business days.

To be truly honest (and I seek that you treat this due discretion!) my real concern is that the Councillors may not have, nor exhibit, a great deal of business acumen and so do not necessarily understand what they are actually debating! I am not being dismissive of the work that is done so diligently, but am concerned that a lack of financial understanding can be unhelpful.

Who knows which of the many candidates will end up forming the next Council but I do think there are some with economic judgement that will be beneficial in the future. I believe in security and appreciation for every and any employee whose role is an important and integral part of the Council delivery of services to the Community.

As you know, I was astonished at the ridiculous debate about cleaning up the mess after the travellers departed. In house ability and availability were ready and present, so no debate was necessary.

I am away now for the next few days but will return to your letter with further scrutiny on my return. If there is any observation I can make that I believe will be constructive and useful then I shall do so. Otherwise, I have probably sought sufficient and been treated to a full and informative response. I thank you for that.

Kind regards

Ian (Pilcher)

PS - final thought. Has there been any more information on the topic of 'applying for approval to apply for a loan'? My thoughts for Days Field would negate any such loan or related risk. The prime objective would be ongoing revenue.

From: Town Clerk | Swaffham Town Council <townclerk@swaffhamtowncouncil.gov.uk>

Sent: 25 March 2019 15:05

To: Ian Pilcher
Subject: RE: Meeting

Dear Ian,

Thank you for your e-mail and for your kind comments in regard to our exhaustive budget process.

I mentioned to you that Councillors already hold three workshop meetings where they chew over the fat and dissect all of our budget cost centres and challenge the individual headings within them. It is a process similar to how Rachel approached the final stages of the Neighbourhood Plan before she locked herself away and write the first draft. Similarly, I am then tasked with taking the guidelines, ideas, aspirations and instructions, putting them all together and producing a draft budget, coupled with the report to explain the detail of where the figures have come from etc. Then we have the budget meeting where everything is scrutinised again and often there are last minute tweaks before it is all agreed.

The information circulated to Councillors and public at the monthly Council meetings is simply presenting payments for approval. A full Income and expenditure analysis is presented to the quarterly finance meetings, but we will see if we can improve the monthly presentation of accounts for payment, for those who receive this information in isolation.

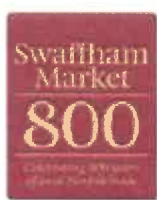
The breakdown of salaries to each Cost Centre is dependant on the actual time worked, so once a year I will adjust these figures following a review in preparation for the forthcoming budget for the following year also making any adjustments necessary in the current year, as I will be projecting through to the year end. I will talk to staff individually if necessary or appropriate, I will assess time sheets for each member of staff and I will make judgement based on the tasks, projects, events or services that have been delivered. There are often one-off issues which need to be accounted for, the review process is necessary and time spent on the analysis is proportionate to the remainder of the budget process. Once the assessment is complete, these calculations are put into a spreadsheet, and the sub-totals are then transferred in to the budget headings.

The issue with the Town Council taking on more facilities at our level has come to the fore the past decade really, as Principal Authorities tighten their financial belts and austerity has taken its toll, they pass the service down to the Town Council, and on more than one occasion it has been the choice of no service, unless the Town Council takes it on. The question has always been whether the Town Council should take on the facility whether it be a play area or open space or indeed street lights. An assessment is made at that time and the Council make an informed decision at the time, these are not policies that are set in stone, each occasion as the opportunity arises, the Council will make a decision as they deem appropriate. We do have some play areas, open spaces and street lights in the pipeline from two estates nearing completion, so these will come on stream in the not too distant future. In terms of staffing in-house or using contractor, again an assessment will be made and my guess is that it will be a bit of both that will eventually be required.

I hope our meeting and exchanges have brought about greater understanding of our salary structure and finances. I look forward to hearing about Days Field in due course.

Best regards,

Richard Bishop
Town Clerk





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From: Ian Pilcher <pilcherian@hotmail.com>

Sent: 22 March 2019 10:56

To: Town Clerk | Swaffham Town Council <townclerk@swaffhamtowncouncil.gov.uk>

Subject: Meeting

Dear Mr Bishop

Thank you again for your subsequent message. For my part, yes indeed, I found all the information and documentation that you kindly provided, to be very informative. A heck of a lot of work clearly went into an impressive Budget presentation document. One must just hope that the audience can actually understand all aspects of a complicated set of sector proposals, which is not easy unless audit experienced: please be assured that this is not a criticism of those who do their very best with limited understanding.

Perhaps your logic of zero increase (due to more households now contributing) was not really understood. Whilst the 1% was an attractive prospect for presentation, it was basically irrelevant in the scheme of things. Then subsequently there was no positive publication of good news that could have been well received. A bit silly really, when Breckland released a full analysis of all Councils so very soon after the Precepts were set. If I were the boss I would have been seeking endorsement of good fiscal management ahead of the increased Precepts arriving on doormats - especially in relation to both Norfolk and Police extravagance!

After an afternoon of poring over figures, my headache has cleared sufficiently to scribe some words. Here goes.

Overall payroll costs at £304156 account for approximately 56% of the TOTAL target incomes, as opposed to 75% of just the Precept. Obviously this is a much better impression and is always justified so long as all remunerations are assessed as essential and cost effective. Delivery of services efficiently and economically justifies some in-house fixed costs, as a proportion of all deliveries of which some will be contractors. Demonstration of this differential would always be helpful to the impression that remuneration value suggests to residents. Therefore it might be helpful for Council meetings, to issue TOTAL revenues alongside,

In further detail, it seems that one area of difficulty in understanding is the method of allocating proportions of wages to cost centres. I understand why but perhaps it is important to be sure these suppositions are an accurate reflection. I think this is especially negative where supposed revenue generators are actually loss making in real terms - allotments and such like - whereas the presentation of toilets is of paramount importance and MUST be an acceptable overhead. Some obligations adopted by Council seem extravagant, (Street Lights), whilst others are not apparently bringing enough 'consumer' revenues to justify full time staffing. Of course that is an interpretation of selecting 'cost centres' for a proportion of staff overheads and does not necessarily diminish the full working time value of those staff on their diversified activities.

The Cost Centre Report is an excellent document and should be helpful to Councillors and Public at Council Meetings, because this highlights progress as at that date. This is useful in showing unexpected gains and highlighting where the forecasts are falling on the wrong side of the Budget.

That's surely enough for now - it certainly is for me! Our interest is intended to be constructive and helpful and respectful of the work and remuneration of Swaffham Council personnel.

We can review Day's Field ideas at a later date - whether anyone will take any notice or assess an alternative option will be anyone's guess and may reflect the make up of the next Council. Same again will not be the most imaginative.

Sincerely with kind regards
Ian (Pilcher)

From: Town Clerk | Swaffham Town Council <townclerk@swaffhamtowncouncil.gov.uk>
Sent: 20 March 2019 13:47
To: Ian Pilcher
Cc: Stan Sole
Subject: RE: Meeting

Dear Ian (and Stan),

Thank you for your e-mail. I thought our discussion this morning was constructive and largely positive, I will take away my thoughts from this and see if I can bring forward some changes that may address the issue of a negative public perception of the Town Council and the desired improved communication.

I look forward to hearing from you in greater detail and of course, with the Days Field matter currently deferred, there is an opportunity to consider any new proposals for how this conundrum might be resolved.

Best regards,

Richard Bishop
Town Clerk



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From: Ian Pilcher <pilcherian@hotmail.com>
Sent: 20 March 2019 13:21
To: Town Clerk | Swaffham Town Council <townclerk@swaffhamtowncouncil.gov.uk>
Cc: Stan Sole <stan.sole@oxford239.plus.com>
Subject: Meeting

Dear Mr Bishop

Today you gave Stan Sole and I a comprehensive insight into the evaluation of the Staff Structure and Payroll costs that appear in the Monthly Finance 'outgoings' as presented to Council Meetings.

I am sure Stan shares my appreciation for your time and your explanations. I will write to you again in the next few days, to try to make constructive evaluation of much that we discussed. I just need to get my head around the complexity before doing so.

In the meantime, I reiterate that my observations are not criticism of the work and delivery of the personnel. Indeed I positively support reward for good delivery of affordable and desirable services. My belief is that 'in house' structure is the best option for most of the services that enhance the presentation and quality of local community lifestyle. It is simply quantifying the best mix of 'in house' availability and flexibility, in relation to immediate response and/or the otherwise specified and pre-arranged provision from out sourced contractors. Perhaps most usually for the more elaborate and 'heavy' works. Of course the ratio for capital equipment, depreciation and running costs will also be assessed.

As you will have gleaned, my simplest observation is that presentation of offsets for staff costs and sales of services to third parties (undertakers?), that defray the gross payroll as presently published, will be beneficial. Open communications can only ever be beneficial in making a respected impression on the local residents.

I will think in more detail and write again in due course. Meanwhile, I reiterate my appreciation for the meeting. Maybe we will talk again over the next few weeks and I have a particular proposal for consideration in development options for Day's Field.

Kind regards

Ian (Pilcher)

PS - please feel free to share this message with any staff or Councillors, with whom you may think this to be of value.