

MINUTES of the FORWARD PLANNING STEERING GROUP, held at Rickards Hall on Monday 04 October 2021, at 7.30 pm.

Present: Cllrs A Baker, A Layland, M McArthur, S McGregor (Chairman), A Read, S Sumner, and B Todd

In attendance: Town Clerk and RFO; one member of the public and no members of the press.

1. TO APPOINT THE CHAIRMAN FOR THE ENSUING YEAR FOR THE FORWARD PLANNING STEERING GROUP

Cllr Todd nominated Cllr McGregor; Members unanimously,

Resolved: to elect Cllr McGregor as Chairman of the Forward Planning Steering Group.

2. TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received, noted and accepted from Cllrs Aldridge and Compton.

3. TO RECEIVE A PRESENTATION FROM PS TECHNOLOGY ON THE COUNCIL'S CURRENT IT FILE STORAGE SYSTEM AND THE BENEFITS OF A MOVE TO CLOUD BASED STORAGE SOLUTIONS

Paul Stanyer, from PS Technology which manages the Town Council's IT solutions, gave a talk on the Council's current IT infrastructure, its server and access. In January, a proposal had been presented to Council to consider as the current server was out of its 5-warranty, having been installed nearly 7-years ago. The recommendation would be to replace every 5-6 years. However, there had since been a shift in cloud computing. Cloud storage systems were now more secure, and there were also software service models. The Council already had monthly Microsoft 365 Business subscriptions which allowed Sharepoint to be used. Some user licences would need to be upgraded; this would add an additional £500 per year to licenses costs. The options for the Council were a) to put a capital investment in to a replacement server, est £12k; or b) move to a cloud storage service which in essence would be renting space, with the benefit of their expertise, a better uptake and services. The set-up migration costs would be a one-off cost of est. £7k.

If the Council did nothing, and continued to rely on the existing server, it would increase the risk over time of the server failing; also replacement parts were costly. With staff having had to work from home the past year, the current VPN connection option was clunky and problematical, but cloud-solution would be more versatile, easier to use and access for staff, and data secure. The recommendation was to move to a software server model.

With more and more applications and services moving to the cloud, it had previously been recommended that the Council consider a dedicated fibre Ethernet broadband connection. This would provide an uncontended (not shared) connection with high bandwidth speeds and business service level agreement with BT. With the new telephone system that uses the broadband and reliance on the use of the internet, it would provide high-capacity connection you can rely on. The annual cost would be est. £3k. (Current standard broadband was £600 per year.)

Members asked questions, and acknowledged that the right tools were needed in the modern world and the reliance on computing and broadband.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS OR PREDETERMINATION

None.

5. TO RECEIVE, ADOPT AND SIGN THE MINUTES OF THE FORWARD PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON [5 October 2020](#)

Resolved: that the minutes of the Council meeting held on 05 October 2020 be duly signed by the Chairman as a true and accurate record of the meeting; pages 9409-9410.

6. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES FOR REPORT AND NOT ELSEWHERE ON THE AGENDA

6.1 To receive an update of the Forward Plan from last meeting

The Plan with updates recorded in red, was received and noted. Members were pleased that despite the pandemic and restrictions, it had managed to achieve a number of the projects: replacement of 31 streetlight columns; defence improvements for Market Yard car park; outdoor gym and multi games facility for Stangrove Park; new tourist information website, visitedenbridge; council office refurbishment; new hall online bookings system; online card payments, Mowshurst car park plannings resurfacing; wildflower areas; additional road safety with portable speed indicator device (SID); and the skate ramp improvements had been commissioned.

7. TO CONSIDER FUTURE PROJECTS

7.1. To consider the Council's IT file storage system and to move to cloud-based storage solutions, and the potential expenditure for budget

Members discussed and noted that cloud solutions provided many benefits and would improve efficiencies, and especially for homeworking. The cost of replacing the server would be more costly than migrating to cloud storage and would be a one-off set-up cost. The cost saving was estimated at £5k. The Microsoft 365 Business licences would have an additional annual increase of £500. Members also noted the benefits of a dedicated fibre broadband; and that the office did already experience drop-off with the current standard broadband. Members unanimously,

Resolved: recommendation to full Council to support improvements to the Council's IT file storage system and to move to cloud-based storage solutions, and the potential expenditure of £7,000 for budget year 2022/23; and to consider upgrading the broadband telecommunications and additional annual expenditure of expenditure of £3,000 per year.

7.2. To consider if the Council is willing to review its assets and consider selling any to lower its reserves deficit

Members unanimously,

Resolved: recommendation to full Council to support a review of the Council's Assets and investigate the costs for commissioning a review for inclusion in the new budget (2022/23).

7.3. To consider the Council's role with the Thursday Market and future strategy to enhance the current Market

Members discussed and noted that office staff time was currently being taken to manage, promote and oversee the running on each Thursday market. It was also noted that the market provided economic and social benefits to the town and residents. Members unanimously,

Resolved: recommendation to full Council to:

- To join NABMA (current membership offer is until 31 March 2023) and the expenditure of £500 plus VAT
- To create a Markets Policy (to formalise Edenbridge as the Market Authority)
- To recruit on a fixed term contract for 1-year (to be reviewed) a person to oversee the Market on Thursdays and to work to increase the number of traders, the profile of the market and organise promotional activities. Est. 8-10 hours per week, £5,500 annual salary budget

7.4. To receive a proposal for Friends of Edenbridge Parks initiative

Members discussed if there would be a benefit to the Council in setting-up a volunteer group to support any of its council run parks; with the Council part of the group. There was already a number around the country set up to operate as a charity trust. They can apply for grants and organise fundraising activities to fund facilities and improvements to parks. The question was also did the Council want to invest staff time to investigate the viability of such a group and preparing its constitution and objectives.

Members unanimously,

Resolved: to support the proposal to investigate the viability and set up a Friends of Edenbridge Parks and charity trust, and create a new volunteer group. This would be added to the Forward Plan, as a medium term project.

7.5. To receive an updated Forward Plan and consider any additional future projects and/or changes to the Plan

Members reviewed the Plan. It was agreed to remove projects already achieved and remove the high street signage. In addition to add to the wish list: Stangrove Park – new footpath. Members unanimously,

Resolved: the updated amended Forward Plan (appendix to the minutes).

8. TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY - TO DISCUSS KEY ISSUES FACING THE TOWN CENTRE AND ASPIRATIONS FOR ITS FUTURE

It was noted that Sevenoaks District Council was looking at its high streets and asking district councillors, councils and members of the public, what was good, bad and could be improved. There was some discussion. District Councillors would report back to SDC.

9. TO MAKE RECOMMENDATION TO THE FINANCE COMMITTEE ANY ADDITIONAL INCREASES TO THE BUDGET, AND PRECEPT TO COVER ANY PROPOSALS FROM THE FORWARD PLAN UPATE

Members noted that the draft budget was yet to be prepared and presented to the Finance Committee's November meeting to consider in detail. This would then be presented to the full Council in December to consider, before formally endorsing at its January meeting. Members unanimously,

Resolved: recommendation to full Council to increase the Precept to fund new projects and help reduce the budget deficit gap in the budget 2022/23.

10. TO CONSIDER ANY PRESS RELEASES

None.

Meeting closed at 21:30