



ASSETS AND SERVICES WORKING GROUP

TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

REPORT 26/21

8 MARCH 2021

The purpose of this Report is to ask Members to confirm the role of the Assets and Services Working Group in the Town Council's governance arrangements and agree its Remit.

NO. DETAILS

1) BACKGROUND

- a) The Assets and Services Working Group began its work as the Public Buildings Working Group set up by the Town Council meeting of 20 May 2013 when, following a discussion of the risks of losing a range of the town's buildings as set out in Report 42/13, the meeting unanimously resolved that:
a Public Buildings Working Group be established of the Deputy Mayor and Councillors Jim Toogood, Stewart Blackmore, Tony Marvin and Brian Lucas to work with the Clerk in identifying proposals for the future of the town's public buildings as the basis for strategic recommendations to future Town Council meetings.
- b) Its first meeting took place on the 11 June 2013.
- c) As the extent of its work grew it became the Assets and Services Working Group from its meeting of 23 May 2017 combining Members and related senior staff.

2) CONTEXT

- a) At time of my appointment as Town Clerk in April 2010 the Town Council was only responsible for one asset – the Winter Gardens – that over the previous 10 years had needed a subsidy of £640,569 from Ventnor residents: almost two thirds (65.5%) of all the precept charged in that time.
- b) The Town Council's financial situation was so dire that in January 2011 I had to formally request that the Isle of Wight Council allow the Town Council to draw down £35,000 against the following year's Precept in order for the Town Council to meet its debts.
- c) By then I had been joined by Alison Killick in October 2010, providing the then Town Council with a staff of just two.
- d) Fortunately the then Town Councillors were innovative and united in their determination to develop a Council that could properly serve the town.
- e) It had a clear understanding of the challenges facing the town, including its disturbing rankings in the Index of Multiple Deprivation and its relative isolation.
- f) Its strategy, enthusiastically taken forward by the Town Council elected in 2013, took full advantage of the potential opened up by the Localism Act 2011 and the Isle of Wight Council's Budget cuts to services the town needed to retain.
- g) The resulting commitment to both regeneration and local control of assets and services has remained a central theme of the work the current Town Council with the resulting responsibility of a very substantial portfolio of both.

3) THE PORTFOLIO

a) *Services:*

The Town Council has taken on a range of services from which the Isle of Wight Council has withdrawn funding as part of its cost cutting required by the government's austerity programme.

- Our *Beach Safety Service* started in 2014 in response to the Isle of Wight Council's cancellation of its Lifeguards provision.
- The following year the Town Council took on its own contract for *Grounds Maintenance* to ,grass cut 13 areas of the of the town that the Isle of Wight Council stopped funding, and that has now been extended to Ventnor Park.

- Also in that year the Town Council took on responsibility for *Beach Cleaning* as the Island-wide service was also withdrawn.
- The Town Council's support for the *Library* began the following year to prevent its planned closure along with others on the Island, taking the form of cleaning and payment of utility costs and one staff salary.
- Our own *Youth Service* started in the 2016/17 financial year as the Island's services were cut by the Isle of Wight Council.

b) *Assets:*

The Assets the Town Council has become responsible for are as set out in the following table:

ASSET	FROM	TO	ASSET	FROM	TO
TOILETS			BUILDINGS		
Esplanade	Freehold		Salisbury Gardens	2014	2065
Marlborough Road	2017	2042	Ventnor Central	2017	2020
Ventnor Park	Freehold		First Aid Hut	2018	2028
Shore Road	2012	2037	FACILITIES		
CAR PARKS			Paddling Pool	2013	2038
Dudley Road	2015	2038	Outdoor Gym	2012	2051
Market Street	2015	2038	Putting Green	2020	2051
Pound Lane	2015	2038	Spring Hill Gardens	2017	2047
Shore Road	2015	2038	Boniface Fields	2021	2051
			Ventnor Park	2021	2051

- c) The consequential responsibilities require arrangements for repairs and maintenance, insurance, risk assessments including fire risk assessments, annual legionella risk assessments, electrical condition inspections, alarms and drills and signage.

4) GOVERNANCE

- a) The governance structures for Town and Parish Councils have their roots in the Local Government Act 1972 when they were very different in size, spread and significance, operating at a level at which their Councillors, meeting at least four times a year, could make all the decisions needed for their work.
- b) Almost 150 years later that is no longer the case: 58 Town and Parish Councils have Precepts in excess of £1,000,000 and another 155 over £500,000.
- c) Many more, including Ventnor, have taken on assets and services on a scale closer to that of bodies like the Urban District Council that preceded Ventnor Town Council until 1974.
- d) Clearly, neither the process of developing the portfolio the Town Council is now responsible nor its ongoing management are deliverable through discussions and decisions made through monthly two-hour meetings of Members.
- e) Principal Authorities recognised that long ago as, more recently, have the larger Town and Parish Councils, with governance arrangements that ensure Members are responsible for all decisions on matters of Strategy, Policy, Projects and Budgeting with Officers being responsible for the implementation of those decisions.
- f) Ventnor Town Council has responded to these circumstances through its Assets and Services Working Group that has been at the centre of and crucial for the development and management of the expanding portfolio.
- g) It has several major strengths:
 - it adds significantly to the experience and expertise of the relatively small management team by including Members with a wide range of related knowledge and skills;
 - ensures Members are involved centrally in the management level of decision making; and
 - meets fortnightly routinely and more often if required.

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- h) In addition to its contribution to the Town Council's operational management function it acts as a supportive think tank for the Town Council in the early testing and development of ideas and proposals for decision by the Town Council.
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5) REMIT

- a) At the Town Council Meeting of 9 March 2020, in response to a request from Councillor Ian Bond for the Group to have a Town Council agreed Remit for its work, Report 20/20 included a draft for such a Remit from the Group's meeting of 3 March 2020.
 - b) Councillor Ian Bond expressed concerns about the draft and Minute 29/20 unanimously asked the Assets and Service Group to consider the proposed Remit further.
 - c) A revised version of the Remit prepared by Councillor Ian Bond was considered by the Group at its meeting of 12 May 2020 when it concluded that it was content with the current draft.
 - d) Councillor Ian Bond has requested that the matter be revisited at this meeting of the Town Council and in preparation for that the Group discussed the issue at its meeting of 2 March 2021.
 - e) The resulting draft Remit is attached to this Report.
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6) RECOMMENDATION

Members are recommended to consider this Report and the attached draft Remit, amend as agreed, and adopt

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VENTNOR TOWN COUNCIL



ASSETS & SERVICES WORKING GROUP

REMIT

9 MARCH 2020

1) ROLE

The Assets & Services Working Group is one of two Advisory Groups established by the Town Council to review areas of its work and make recommendations to the full Town Council about the management and development of the activities within its remit

2) MEMBERSHIP

- i) Its Membership will consist of Members appointed at each Annual Town Council Meeting and related senior staff.
- ii) Membership can be amended at the Town Council's monthly meetings.

3) MEETINGS

- i) The Group will meet regularly at dates and times it agrees and notifies to all Members.
- ii) The Chair of the Town Council will Chair its meetings or in his or her absence the Chair will be selected from among its Councillor members.
- iii) As the Group has no delegated powers, its meetings are not open to the public.
- iv) Notes of the meetings will be kept by the Clerk or Assistant Clerk and circulated to all Members of the Council.

4) RESPONSIBILITIES

- i) The Group is responsible for the operational management of the Town Council's freehold and leasehold physical assets and the services related to them.
 - ii) The Group's Remit includes the legal and insurance responsibilities that come with these assets and of the services the Town Council delivers.
 - iii) The Group will also provide the Town Council with the 'think tank' function of exploring options for further delivery of the Town Council's strategic aims in order to develop recommendations to a future Town Council meeting.
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THE ASSETS CURRENTLY WITHIN THE ASSET & SERVICES WORKING GROUP ARE AS LISTED

ASSET	FROM	TO`
TOILETS		
Esplanade		Freehold
Marlborough Road	2017	2042
Ventnor Park		Freehold
Shore Road	2012	2037
CAR PARKS		
Dudley Road	2015	2038
Market Street	2015	2038
Pound Lane	2015	2038
Shore Road	2015	2038

ASSET	FROM	TO
BUILDINGS		
Salisbury Gardens	2014	2065
Ventnor Central	2017	2020
First Aid Hut	2018	2028
FACILITIES		
Paddling Pool	2013	2038
Outdoor Gym	2012	2051
Putting Green	2020	2051
Spring Hill Gardens	2017	2047
Boniface Fields	2021	2051
Ventnor Park	2021	2051