



GROUNDS MAINTENANCE

TOWN COUNCIL MEETING REPORT 97/19

9 DECEMBER 2019

The purpose of this Report is to advise Members of adjustments to the Isle of Wight Council's new Grounds Maintenance Contract that is effective from 1 January 2020 and to consider the Town Council's role in the funding and operation of Ventnor Park.

NO. DETAILS

1) BACKGROUND

- a) Grounds Maintenance was one of the early services the Isle of Wight Council selected for significant Budget savings, informing Town and Parish Councils in the autumn of 2014 that it was intended to reduce the service to the level of statutory requirements only and offering options for the Town and Parish Councils to fill the gap.
- b) Ventnor Town Council chose the option of employing its own contractor to work to the then current standards for 18 grassed areas and the Cascades - which was to be excluded from the list of Principal Parks but excluding Ventnor Park which remained covered by the Isle of Wight Council's own contract with John O'Conner.
- c) The Town Council tendered a contract prepared by the then Public Buildings Working Group that was awarded to John O'Conner from 1 March 2015 and a provision of £20,000 was included in the 2015/16 Budget.
- d) The Isle of Wight Council intended to retender its Grounds Maintenance Contract from 1 January 2019 but that was later postponed to 1 January 2020.
- e) Its new contract has now been agreed and continues to be with John O'Conner

2) VENTNOR PARK

- a) The Isle of Wight Council's plan for its new contract involves the reduction of the specification for the Principal Parks – including Ventnor's – to the statutory requirements of grass cutting and bin emptying while giving the relevant Town and Parish Councils the option of funding the difference between the statutory provision and current standards.
- b) The Town Council became aware of the Isle of Wight Council's proposal for its new contract in late 2017 and the option of adding the additional cost – then thought to be of the order of £30,000 – to the Precept was included in the consultation evening of 29 January 2018 along with two other new funding proposals, youth work and Boniface Fields.
- c) Over 100 residents attended that event forming 15 discussion groups each of which was asked to assess its support for including the projects in the Town Council's Precept Budget at £30,000 a year on a five point scale: Strongly Support, Support, Neutral, Oppose, Strongly Oppose.
- d) The results were: 12 Strongly Support, 3 Support and 1 Neutral.
- e) On that basis, and with the new contract at that time expected to be effective from 1 January 2019, a provision of £7,500 was included in the Town Council's 2018/19 Budget and, with the postponement of the new contract by a year, the same provision is in the current year's Budget.
- f) The Isle of Wight Council's Strategic Manager Recreation and Public Spaces Lee Matthews informed the Town Council that the required funding level from the Town Council to bridge the gap will be of the order of £24,000 a year.
- g) If the Town Council continues its commitment to maintain Ventnor Park at its established standards, the Isle of Wight Council will agree to lease the Park to the Town Council for the duration of the five-year contract with any income from activities in the Park being retained by the Town Council.

3) OTHER AREAS

- a) The 18 other areas from which the Isle of Wight Council withdrew grounds maintenance funding in 2015 were taken on by the Town Council under its own contract with John O'Conner.
- b) The current cost of that contract is £26,964 a year and is provided within the Precept Budget.
- c) The Assets and Services Working Group has been planning to retender this contract but that has been postponed due to the uncertainty about the Isle of Wight Council's new contract.
- d) Given the time constraints, there would be an advantage in agreeing with John O'Conner a one year extension to the Town Council's current contract with them with an inflation uplift.

4) RECOMMENDATION

Members are recommended to:

- i) agree to fund the additional grounds maintenance works required to retain the Park's current high standards from the Precept from 2020/21 at the anticipated level of £24,000 a year subject to agreement on a lease of the Park from the Isle of Wight Council for a period of at least five years
 - ii) request John O'Conner to agree a one year extension of the Town Council's existing contract for grounds maintenance on the basis of an inflation-linked increase.
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