

Proposal for improving the environment of the town through the establishment of a Town Crew

Background

Abergavenny Town Council currently contributes £41,300 each year towards Waste Services.

Overall, the town is reasonably well maintained but look deeper and there are areas/features throughout the town that require greater attention. These are Bailey Park, Linda Vista Gardens, car parks, street furniture, fences and railings and street cleansing. Improving these areas would include elements of grounds and horticulture, painting and street cleansing.

Currently, Abergavenny Town Council has little input into the direction of activity for scheduled work and cannot direct resources to carry out reactive work. Requests can and are made to MCC officers for specific work to be undertaken.

A Town Crew has been set up in Chepstow by MCC and Chepstow Town Council, so lessons learned from this exercise will benefit Abergavenny.

Previous discussions

Monmouthshire County Council and Abergavenny Town Council started to explore the options for creating such a team to undertake these works back in 2018/19.

During the budget discussions for 2020/21 it was agreed to 'park' the Town Crew proposals to allow sufficient time for a MCC restructure to bed in. The MCC restructure included 2 new supervisor posts, one for the north covering Abergavenny and Monmouth and one for the south of the county together with deputy supervisors.

In advance of the budget setting for 2021/22, it is timely to reconsider a revised Town Crew proposal which takes into account the new MCC structure. There are 4 options to consider as set out below:

Option 1 – Status Quo

Abergavenny Town Council would continue to contribute to the street cleansing at similar levels with an annual uplift. This would pay for a manual street sweeper. All other grounds maintenance work would be routine maintenance directed by MCC. Additional work identified by ATC would be subject to request to MCC.

Cost: there would be no additional cost with this option

Option 2: Town Crew with Supervisor role undertaken by MCC

Previously, the structure of the Town Crew was costed at £110,000 a year and included a Team Leader. Under this option the Team Leader role could be deleted from the structure and this role undertaken by the MCC Supervisor &/or Deputy Supervisor. MCC agrees that this could be an option.

In place of a Team Leader an additional Band C operative would be included in the revised structure thereby still retaining the team of three - 2 mobile crew and 1 manual sweeper (existing post). As there has been an annual increase in salaries from when the original structure was costed, the revised total is the same at £110,000 as there is not a significant salary differential between the Band C operative and the Band D which would have been the Team Leader post. The Town Crew would undertake both programmed work, reactive works and ATC directed works.

Should the Town Council at some point in the future want to manage the service directly, then under this option a Team Leader would need to be appointed. If a team of three is to continue under the employment of ATC, the Team Leader could be a promotion of one of the operatives or if not redundancy of one of the operatives would be required to create a Team Leader post in the structure whilst still retaining the team of three.

Cost: There would be an annual budgetary increase of £68,500

Option 3: Town Crew with Supervisor (Team Leader) role

This option would give the greatest flexibility for the Town Council as the Town Crew is self-contained team. The Team Leader would liaise on a day to day basis with the Town Clerk to discuss work schedule and would arrange work of the Town Crew accordingly.

In the future should the Town Council decide to manage the service directly, a Team Leader is in place and the Town Crew could transfer to the Town Council without the potential issues outlined above.

There would be a requirement for liaison between the MCC Grounds Maintenance Team and the Town Crew.

Cost: There would be an annual budgetary increase of £71,000

Option 4: Reduced Town Crew with Supervisor role undertaken by MCC and one additional member of staff employed

Under this option, the Town Crew would consist of a team of 2 with one of these being the current manual sweeper. In effect it would be one additional member of staff as the supervisor role would be undertaken by MCC.

This option is not advised as it would not give sufficient capacity to bring about the desired difference in the town and it brings into play issues of lone working and safety.

For this reason, this option is not costed up in detail.

Principles for Partnership Agreement

The benefits of a Town Crew would be:

- Partnership working between two Councils with a common aim of increasing the street scene of a local area

- ATC benefits from the operational expertise (including legal requirements of operating this service safely) of MCC on an interim basis until they are confident to manage the service directly.
- ATC liaises on a day-to-day basis with the Supervisor role enabling a level of management over the work of the team, in accordance with an agreed SLA.
- ATC benefits from MCC HR, Payroll, Management, Training, vehicle hire, equipment and is able to utilise assistance from MCC until confident to take these on directly.
- Residents, businesses and tourists benefit from a cleaner and tidier town
- Local employment opportunities for a new Town Crew
- ATC will have the ability to directly improve the town
- There would be an initial period of 2 or 3 years that the Town Crew would be employed by MCC

Staff Implications

The Town Crew would operate separately but be supervised by MCC. If ATC chooses to review this structure in future as part of a handover or an expansion to the services, that is outside the scope of the original agreement, ongoing support would be provided by MCC.

Back up for service provision will be from amongst the Crew and additional staff cover will only be provided by MCC in line with other MCC operational priorities on the day.

The Supervisor role is crucial to ensuring that the Crew contribution to Abergavenny is effective, focused and prioritised. It will combine the supervision and prioritisation of the Crew members' duties, liaison with ATC staff to respond to local demands.

ATC would be involved in full recruitment process, and ongoing performance management of the team with MCC and this would be in line with MCC existing policies and procedures in relation to recruitment, training, ongoing performance, capability, sickness etc.

The vehicle and uniforms will display Town Crew livery with recognition of MCC collaboration and will be purchased jointly as part of the Agreement.

Staff Functions

A schedule of works that the Crew will undertake would need to be agreed between ATC and MCC at the outset of the partnership arrangement but sufficient capacity would be built into the Town Crew team to enable them to undertake additional reactive or priority works for ATC.

Below is a list of the sort of tasks that would be included as part of the partnership agreement:

- Manual Street cleaning – weekdays and weekend
- Litter picking – black spots, reactive to requests, complaints etc.
- Daily litter bin emptying (less frequent dependant upon usage)

- Events support (signage, setting out stalls, barriers etc) – *requires training*
- Horticulture - including planting and maintenance of newly planted beds as well as existing (*note – maintenance of planters and baskets to be sourced externally as now*)
- Graffiti removal/covering
- Repairs, cleaning and decoration to street/park furniture/fencing – benches, bins, bollards, signs etc.

(Note – toilet cleaning functions will be discussed as a later phase).

Partnership Agreement Operating Principles

The Partnership Agreement would incorporate provisions to deal with both a termination event, but also the ending of the agreement to support a transfer.

Employment through MCC provides operational experience and administrative back up to establish the Town Crew until such time as ATC considers whether or not to tender the service, or indeed bring it “in house”. To facilitate this collaboration on a new exemplar service MCC will anticipate a contribution towards the management and supervision costs, it is provided for in the budget at approximately 10% of the Town Crew budget. These costs would not be provided following the transfer of the Town Crew.

MCC has a statutory duty under the Environment Protection Act Section 89 to keep the streets tidy. If the Town Crew transfers to ATC, MCC would anticipate some form of agreement between ATC and MCC in relation to undertaking the functions required in order for MCC to maintain their statutory compliance.

PROPOSED STRUCTURE & ANNUAL FEE

| Element | Option 2 | Option 3 |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|
| Band D Operative x 1 Salary Costs | 0 | 20944 |
| Band D Operative x 1 NI, Superann & Apprenticeship Levy | 0 | 7527 |
| Band C Operative x 3 Option 2 or x 2 Option 3 Salary Costs | 58663 | 39492 |
| Band C Operative x 3 Option 2 or x 2 Option 3 NI, Superann & Apprenticeship Levy | 21200 | 14134 |
| Estimated costs for crew vehicle including maintenance and fuel | 10000 | 10000 |
| Estimated costs for plant hire, materials, waste disposal (actuals to be provided in monthly reporting meetings) | 10000 | 10000 |
| Subtotal | 99863 | 102097 |
| MCC Supervision and Management at 10% of total costs | 9986 | 10210 |
| Total | 109849 | 112307 |

The current ATC costs of £41,300 a year would be subtracted from the above cost as the street cleansing role will be subsumed within the Town Crew Team.

Budget Implications

Assuming there are no other changes to the budget and it remains at the 2020/21 level of £403,995, the establishment of a Town Crew under option 2 would increase the budget by 17% and option 3 by 17.5%.

In terms of the precept, for illustrative purposes only (as MCC has not yet provided the Band D equivalent figure for 2021/22) and assuming the budget remains at the 2020/21 level, Option 2 would increase the precept on a Band D property by £14.18 a year (17.4%) and Option 3 by £14.68 (18%).

Full discussion on the draft budget 2021/22 will be on the agenda for the December Council meeting and Members will have the opportunity to consider how best to fund the establishment of the Town Crew should they agree in principle to do so at the November meeting.

Recommendation

To agree to the establishment of a Town Crew with a Team Leader in the structure (option 3) subject to agreement of the necessary funding during the 2021/22 budget setting process.