Cyngor Tref Trallwng Welshpool Town Council

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OFFICERS RECOMMENDATION

1. **To note that the additional assets installed as part of the Town Centre Improvement Project will require an ongoing maintenance resource, and that this should be planned for rather than automatically absorbed within existing workloads; and**
2. **To decide which option to select (if any).**

1. Purpose

1. To consider how Welshpool Town Council can ensure the additional street furniture, planters, planting, signage and other improvements being delivered through the Town Centre Improvement Project are maintained to a high standard once installed.
2. The report also considers the wider need to improve day-to-day presentation of the town centre, particularly in advance of the Tour de France Grand Départ in July 2027, and options for providing sufficient staffing or contracted capacity to achieve this

2. Background

1. Welshpool Town Council is investing significantly in the appearance and attractiveness of the town centre through the Town Centre Improvement Project. This includes new and improved street furniture, planters and planting, signage and other public realm improvements.
2. The investment provides an opportunity to make a noticeable improvement to how Welshpool looks and feels. However, installing new infrastructure is only part of the project. Without an appropriate maintenance arrangement, the condition and appearance of these improvements will inevitably deteriorate.
3. There is also a wider issue with the maintenance of the town centre. Powys County Council remains responsible for a number of areas and functions, but available resources mean that routine activities such as weed removal and general environmental maintenance are not always carried out as frequently as would be desirable. This can result in weeds, litter and other relatively minor maintenance issues having a disproportionate effect on the overall appearance

of the town.

4. The Town Council therefore needs to consider whether it wishes simply to maintain the additional assets it is installing, or take a more proactive role in maintaining the overall appearance of the town centre.

5. This is particularly relevant ahead of the Tour de France Grand Départ, with Stage 3 starting from Welshpool on 4 July 2027. The event will place Welshpool in front of a very large number of visitors and a significant television and media audience. The months leading up to the event provide an opportunity to improve the town centre and, importantly, establish arrangements which can continue afterwards.

3. Town Centre Condition

1. The condition of the town centre is not simply a cosmetic issue. A clean, attractive and well-maintained environment supports the Council's wider objectives for tourism, economic development and community pride.

2. Visitors form an impression of a place from relatively small things: clean streets, maintained planters, attractive planting, clean signs, freshly painted street furniture and the absence of prominent weeds and litter.

3. An attractive environment can encourage visitors to spend more time in the town centre, support repeat visits and complement the work being undertaken through Visit Welshpool to promote local businesses and attractions. Conversely, investing in new street furniture and planting while allowing the surrounding environment to become poorly maintained would reduce the impact of that investment.

4. Current Resources

1. The Council currently has an Operations Team of four employees. The team already undertakes a broad range of duties across the Council's estate and services.

2. Existing workloads are such that the team already has difficulty completing all desirable work within the resources available. Adding responsibility for regular town centre maintenance without either reducing other duties or increasing capacity therefore carries a significant risk that either the town centre work or existing responsibilities would not be completed to the required standard.

3. The Council has invested in new equipment which should improve productivity, however this has allowed the work to be done the standard it should have been, not neccessarily unlocking large amounts of capacity - along with additions to our portfolio e.g. Ponthowell and Land Adj to Pure Beauty.

5. Additional Maintenance

1. A defined town centre maintenance programme could include regular inspection and cleaning of street furniture and signs; weed removal around streets, kerbs, planters and street furniture; maintenance and watering of planting; litter picking and removal of accumulated debris; minor painting and repairs; reporting defects requiring specialist attention; removal of stickers and other minor environmental issues; and additional work ahead of events and periods of high visitor numbers.

2. A dedicated resource could also provide an important "eyes and ears" function. Issues could be identified and either resolved immediately or reported to the appropriate organisation rather than remaining unnoticed until a complaint is received.

3. The precise division between Town Council and County Council responsibilities would need to remain clear. Taking practical action to improve the town should not inadvertently create uncertainty over ownership or statutory maintenance responsibilities.

6. Options

1. Option 1 - Existing Operations Team
    1. The Council could add the maintenance of the new infrastructure and wider town centre work to the Operations Team's existing responsibilities.
    2. This has no significant additional staffing cost and provides direct control over the work. Staff are already familiar with the Council's assets and working practices.
    3. However, the team is already operating across a wide range of responsibilities and there is limited spare capacity. This option risks spreading existing resources more thinly and potentially moving the problem elsewhere. It may be suitable for maintaining individual new Council assets but is unlikely, without other changes, to provide the regular proactive presence required to make a substantial difference to the wider town centre.
2. Option 2 - Targeted Contracting
    1. Specific activities could be contracted externally, for example scheduled weed removal, street cleaning, specialist planting maintenance, pressure washing or repairs.
    2. Contracting has the advantage of purchasing capacity when it is required without creating an additional permanent staffing commitment. Specialist contractors may also undertake certain jobs more efficiently.
    3. The disadvantages are that repeated contracting can become expensive and contractors will generally work to a defined specification rather than provide the continuous presence of somebody who notices and deals with smaller problems as they arise.
3. Option 3 - Self-Employed Town Centre Ranger
    1. The Council could engage a self-employed Town Centre Ranger for an agreed number of hours to undertake routine town centre maintenance.
    2. This could provide flexibility and potentially reduce some employment-related administration and costs.
    3. There is, however, an important limitation. Whether somebody is genuinely self-employed is determined by the reality of the working relationship rather than simply describing the arrangement as self-employed. If the Council determines the individual's hours, duties, location, methods of work and provides equipment, and the person works regularly as part of the Council's service, the arrangement could resemble employment under HMRC rules.
    4. This option would therefore require careful consideration before proceeding and may not be appropriate for a permanent role which the Council intends to manage closely.
    5. A self employed ranger would not be able to legally issue fixed penalty notices under the Council's authority for littering, graffiti, fly-posting and byelaw infractions.
4. Option 4 - Directly Employed Town Centre Ranger
    1. The Council could directly employ a Town Centre Ranger for up to 16 hours per week.
    2. Using the suggested grading of SCP 5 (£26,427 full-time equivalent), the basic annual salary would be approximately £11,885, with estimated total employment costs of approximately £13,749 per annum.
    3. The post could have a clear focus on maintaining the appearance of the town centre rather than becoming absorbed into the wider Operations workload.

4. Typical duties could include weeding, litter removal, planter maintenance, cleaning street furniture and signage, minor repairs and painting, identifying defects, preparing the town ahead of events and supporting other environmental improvements.

5. The principal disadvantage is the creation of an ongoing staffing commitment. However, it would provide predictable capacity and direct Council control over priorities and standards. The disadvantage is mitigated by fixed term contracts which then limit the Council's exposure to a ongoing staffing commitment.

5. Option 5 - Seasonal Directly Employed Town Centre Ranger
    1. An alternative would be to employ the same post seasonally, concentrating resources during the period when vegetation growth, visitor numbers and outdoor events create the greatest demand.

    2. On the assumptions above, approximately half a year would produce a basic salary cost of around £5,943, with total employment costs broadly in the region of £6,875, depending on the precise employment period and on-costs.

    3. For example, the post could operate approximately April to September each year.

    4. This would concentrate resources when they are most valuable while avoiding the full cost of a year-round post. The disadvantage is that maintenance requirements do not disappear during winter and the existing Operations Team would need to absorb work outside the seasonal period.

7. Comparison of Options

1.

Option	Cost	Benefit	Concern
1	Minimal	No new resource required	Team already at or near capacity
2	Variable	Flexible and useful for specialist work	Less proactive and costs can mount up
3	Unknown	Flexible dedicated resource	Employment status issues
4	£13,749	Dedicated accountable resource	Ongoing revenue commitment
5	£6,875	Dedicaed accountable resource at highest demand periods	Reduced coverage over winter

2. These options are not necessarily mutually exclusive. For example, a seasonal Ranger could undertake routine work while contractors are used for specialist or larger-scale activities and the Operations Team continues to deal with Council assets requiring its skills or equipment.

8. Economic Benefits

1. It is difficult to place a precise financial value on improved maintenance, and the Council should avoid claiming that a particular amount spent on maintenance will generate a particular amount of additional economic activity, however, there is a clear relationship between the quality of the public realm, visitor experience and the attractiveness of a town as a place to visit and spend time.

2. The proposed expenditure should therefore be viewed partly as protection of the Council's existing investment. The Council is spending significant sums improving Welshpool's public realm - providing new assets without making adequate provision for their ongoing care would represent poor value for that investment.

9. Strategic Benefits

1. There may also be merit in viewing the role as more than simply a maintenance operative. A visible Town Centre Ranger could become a recognisable presence within Welshpool, responsible for spotting problems and ensuring they are addressed quickly. Over time the role could help coordinate issues between the Town Council, Powys County Council, businesses and other landowners.

2. A Town Centre Ranger could also undertake a role in issuing Fixed Penalty Notices for byelaw infractions, littering, graffiti etc in line with any policy as agreed by Council in the future. The income generated from these FPNs could be used to offset the cost.

10. Suggested Approach

1. There is a strong case for not relying solely on the existing Operations Team due to our other responsibilities across our assets.

2. The Town Clerk has no preference vs contractor, self employed or directly employed as all three approaches will lead to the results we would like to see. There is benefit in direct employment vs self employed due to the HMRC rules around employment and a directly employed person would be easier to direct in terms of their tasks, however would lead to further line management for someone.

11. Financial Implications

1. A seasonal 16-hour post would require approximately £6,875 per annum, while a year-round post would require approximately £13,749 per annum. If a contractor or self employed approach was selected then we could work to the maximum cost (as the above costs incl on-costs).

2. Additional provision may be required for PPE, equipment, materials and training, although much of the necessary equipment may already be available within the Operations Team.

3. Contributions could be sought to reduce the cost to the Council via local businesses through a Service Level Agreement or sponsorship. If the Ranger was employed and FPNs were issued by them then that income is required by law to be ringfenced to these activities which could reduce the cost further.

12. Recommendation

1. To note that the additional assets installed as part of the Town Centre Improvement Project will require an ongoing maintenance resource, and that this should be planned for rather than automatically absorbed within existing workloads; and

2. To decide which option to select (if any).

13. Decision

1. To resolve the recommendations as above.