

The questions in this document were submitted by Cllr. Steve Thomas the evening before the EGM Precept meeting. The answers have been prepared by the Clerk ahead of the meeting and were given to Council during the meeting.

*L. Matthews
Town Clerk & RFO*

1. The Clerks salary is actually £26972.40, so with a cost of living pay rise that will begin in April 2025, budgeting for £27000 is too low, this figure should be £28000.

The Clerk advised Council that it was for Council to decide on the figure for her salary. Council agreed to increase this from 27,000 to 28,000 to cover the eventuality of a pay rise in April 2025, should this come about.

2. Training and DBS. The intention here is unclear. The budget states that the remainder of the current 2024-25 budget will be rolled over, and that £500 is budgeted for 2025-26. Is this an additional £500 in the training budget, or not, and if not, what has happened to the remainder of the rollover as nowhere near £1500 has been spent on the budget this year? I believe that you will understand my confusion on this matter as "rolling over" is dealt with inconsistently throughout the budget.

When the Finance committee met to revise the budget due to unexpected additional expenditure (Brunel Quay Toilets & additional support for the Burial Board), this budget was dropped from £1,500 to £500. This £500 has not been utilised so far, so there is £500 to rollover. £500 has been budgeted for 2025/26, which is to add on to the £500 rolled over from 2024/25. Total budget for 2025/26 is £1,000. DBS is FOC to Councillors.

3. How much of this year's Clerks training budget is remaining? If the Council chooses to send Ms Matthews on the CiLCA course which she will be eligible to undertake in August, will this amount cover the cost? I refer to point 2. which would suggest that there is no addition to the budget next year.

The entire sum of £1,350.00 is still available. CiLCA is mandatory, as per the Clerk's contract and the Clerk has eligible to undertake this since August 24. The CiLCA qualification costs approx. £1,000. The remaining £350, the Clerk would like to utilise for website management training.

4. The sum of £4000 is too low. I cannot say anymore about this at this time.

This sum is in reference to the budgeted allowance for the Council's annual insurance. (PL, EL and Assets) Cllr. Thomas was asked to explain, as the query was not particularly forthcoming. Cllr. Thomas stated that he believes it will cost more. The Clerk and Council counteracted this, as from liaising with Clerk's from our close Council's, NTC seem to be paying a sum substantially higher than others. The Clerk is tasked to investigate and compare insurance at the renewal date.

5. The Welsh language budget is too low. At present NTC is not following legislation, translation costs can be high, as can updating of the website, additional print media etc, should this become a pressing matter, which it could be with only one simple complaint.

The Clerk advised this was for Council to decide. A small debate ensued, however, overall the sum was agreed to remain at £50 and Council would utilise reserves if necessary.

6. Why has nothing been included in the contingencies? Is it because we have such a high balance in the current account?

The Clerk directed Council to a document she had prepared showing the estimated reserve figures and EOY balance, which showed an approximate EOY balance of £25,000. The Clerk advised that the Finance committee believed this was ample to cover contingencies, so to keep our precept as low as we possibly could, we would not be requesting any additional monies for the sub header 'contingencies.

7. Audit costs, is this the actual figure for the next internal and external audit, or an estimate?

This is an approximate figure. Neyland Town Council are due a Full Audit from Audit Wales next year, so will cost more than the annual Audit Submission.

8. Twinning. Why is there now a budget for £1000 here? Is it because Cllr Phelan is expecting to be Mayor and is now planning a visit? The budget states that the Sanguinet Committee has a planned visit, when did the committee decide this, and when did the committee last meet?

The Clerk felt she must point out the disgusting and antagonistic comment Cllr. Thomas had felt necessary to make here towards Cllr. A Phelan, without any basis of knowledge on the decision. The Clerk further advised that the Sanguinet Twinning Committee are planning two visits to us next year (one with the School children in April, which the Clerk and Cllr. A Phelan are meeting with the school on Tuesday to discuss, and another from the Classic Car Committee of Sanguinet in July time). We intend to host them at a luncheon, or something thereabouts.

9. I refer to the point that I made in 2. above, is this an additional £2000 added to the budget and what will be rolled over from this year? How much is currently remaining in this year's budget, not forgetting that there are two months of the fiscal year remaining when that money could be given as grants? If that happens, £2000 in next year's budget is too low, as it can be wiped out with just two successful applications.

This is in reference to the Community Enhancement Committee budget. The Clerk clarified that there is currently £4,650.00 in the budget 'pot' for the Community Enhancement Committee, which, by resolution of Council, will always rollover into the next fiscal year. The Clerk further clarified that the Finance committee discussed an additional £2,000.00, bringing the total to a good sum of £6,650.00 for our Community to utilise for 2025/26. It was again stated that the Finance Committee were incredibly conscious of the current cost of living crisis, and we are mindful of keeping our precept request as low as we possibly can.

10. Considering the latest figures circulated by the Chair of the Burial Board, £10000 is approximately £3500 too low. Incidentally, I sincerely hope that lessons have been learnt by certain Members of this Council regarding cutting the Board's precept to the bone out of spite, simply to reduce the Board's reserves, now that there must be an acceptance that there is nothing left to cover not only projects that should be undertaken, but also essential spending.

The Clerk confirmed that the Burial Board figures had only been received from the Chair of the Burial Board that morning, which she had then immediately circulated to Council. The £10,000 budget had been prepared on an estimate during the Finance Committee meeting. It was discussed that the Burial Board had requested support for 2025/26 at the sum of £13,500 - £15,000 from NTC, with Llanstadwell Community Council already having confirmed their support of £5,000. Again, in order to keep the precept request as low as possible, the Clerk advised Council that she thought it sensible to keep our budget request at £10,000 and then adding an additional sub section to our Earmarked Reserves for the Burial Board, with the sum of £5,000 to be held for the Burial Board to utilise if they reach that eventuality.

11. Christmas, is £15000 enough when there is likely to be a requirement to replace more of the festoons this year? The Christmas Working Group brought in funding of circa £5400 over the last two years, along with several other donated services. Considering the actions of the Clerk and Cllr Hay's cohort last year, I would not rely on that happening again.

The Clerk advised Council that the sum of £15,000 is already a staggering sum for a Christmas budget. She further advised that the majority of this sum is purely spent on the Christmas Lights. The Clerk stated that we simply must work within the £15,000 budget already in place for Christmas and that we should not spend what we haven't got. Cllr. Hay advised that we cannot just throw money at things and increase budgets, as this comes directly from ratepayers' money. Our focus is wholly on keeping costs as low as possible for our residents.

12. What is the basis of the £400 fireworks budget?

The costs of the Fireworks display are majoritively recuperated via donations on the gate on the night of the display. This year, the display made a loss of £632, which was subsidised 50/50 by Neyland Community Hub, meaning the overall cost to NTC of the Fireworks Display in 2024 was £316. Given this, the Finance committee felt it fair to implement a small budget to cover us if this was to happen again.

13. Miscellaneous/Civic Events. Please see point 2. above. How much is currently in the budget to be rolled over, is the £5000 in next year's budget additional to that? Why is this budget so high? What did Remembrance Sunday cost this fiscal year?

Again, during the meeting to revise the budget due to additional, unexpected expenditure for 2024/25, the budget for Misc/Civic Events was reduced to £3,000 instead of £5,000. There is currently £2,640 remaining to be rolled over. The budget for 2025/26 has been set at £5,000, giving a total pot of £7,640 for 2025/25. It was decided to allocate this amount due to VE Day 80th Anniversary, a Mayors Civic event and support for Neyland Carnival CIC. The committee also factored in contingencies for any additional events that we are not yet aware of. Remembrance Sunday & D-Day 80th Anniversary cost £360 combined.

14. Regarding the Public Works Loan, can this figure change, is the interest rate fixed?

This figure will remain the same until the loans come to an end. There are 3 separate loans at a fixed rate. The amount will lessen as the loans are paid back but will not increase.

15. Members allowances, £2200 is not enough to cover 12 Councillors. The figure should be £2424.

The figure you have provided is the sum of all 12 Councillors accepting the £156 Annual allowance as well as the £52 consumables allowance. Historically, not all Members accept the £156 mandatory allowance and very few accept the additional £52 consumables allowance. I have also already been made aware by some Members that they do not intend to take their allowance next year either. The sum of £2,200 is ample to cover allowances that will be accepted.

16. Why has the expenses budget been reduced to such a low figure?

This is another figure which was reduced from £750 to £250 during the Budget revision meeting. So far for 2024/25, only £25 of this budget has been utilised, as has been a similar figure historically. The committee felt £250 was ample.

17. Considering the average cost of an election (one Ward) is approximately £7000, and there could be more than one a year, the recommended figure of £3000 is too low, £6000 may be sufficient.

Elections currently have a sum of £4,000 sat in our Earmarked reserves. An additional sum of £6,000 will be added to this from the EOY balance, bringing our total reserves for Elections to £10,000. Given this, the sum of £3,000 seemed sufficient.

18. Why no copier budget, we still have copier costs with the new agreement?

As agreed, back in September(ish), the photocopier has now been bought out of lease, therefore, there are no further quarterly payments for this. The agreement with Glyn Edwards for paper, ink, toner and maintenance comes from the budget for stationary.

19. Environmental services, is that for the flower beds, and didn't they cost more than that this year?

The cost for the flowers for 2025/26 has already been circulated to Council. The cost of this is £1,337.50.

20. Play park, please see point 2. above. Is the £3000 in next year's budget additional to any rollover from this year, and how much currently remains in this year's budget?

The Play Park & Skate Park currently have a figure of £6,000 in our Earmarked reserves. A further £4,000 will be added to this figure from the EOY balance, bringing the total in our reserves for the Play Park & Skate Park to £10,000. Given this, the sum of £3,000 seemed sufficient for the budget.