

Alcester Town Council

How Alcester Town Council ensures that the council delivers value for money

Value for Money (VFM) is defined as the relationship between economy, efficiency and effectiveness (the 3E's). Achieving VFM means achieving a balance between all three: relatively low costs, high productivity and valued outcomes. It is consistent with the duty of "Best Value" placed on Alcester Town Council (ATC) under the Local Government Act 1999.

ATC fully understands that its main source of income is the precept (part of the Council tax) and it therefore has significant responsibilities for the financial stewardship of public money. It recognizes its responsibility to achieve VFM in service delivery and ensures that it does this by robust budgeting procedures. ATC's Financial Regulations and Standing Orders are reviewed annually and outline the financial rules regarding procurement at all levels.

Economy: Minimising the cost of resources used or required.

As far as reasonable and practical, ATC seeks competitive quotes for routine expenditure to secure VFM. However, ATC does not necessarily accept the cheapest quote but instead looks for the best value. Sometimes ATC collaborates with other local organisations to fund new community facilities e.g. the recent renovation of the Greig Hall was funded partly by ATC, partly by charitable donations, public fundraising and by grants.

The renovation was managed by ATC using numerous small contractors which kept costs down to a minimum. Materials were sourced direct from local suppliers at cost and some materials and labour were provided free of charge.

Efficiency: Comparing output from goods or services and the resources to obtain them.

ATC owns large sections of land within the town. The play areas require regular grass cutting and this is done by external contractors - this contract goes out to competitive tender when due for renewal to ensure VFM. Contractors' work is monitored to ensure levels of performance are maintained throughout the term of the contract.

Other maintenance work, such as litter picking, bin emptying and grass cutting is done by a small team of grounds staff employed by ATC. This team is managed to ensure that they work efficiently and as they are employees, there is more flexibility in organising their workload meaning that, for example, weather conditions can be taken into account rather than work being fixed to a schedule. The team can all cover for each other during periods of annual leave ensuring that the service is uninterrupted.

Opportunities are continuously sought to identify increased efficiencies and make savings eg the insurance policy was renewed for 3 years via a broker resulting in a saving and certainty in budgeting.

Effectiveness: The relationship between the intended and actual results of public spending (outcomes).

ATC allocates resources in line with the Council's priorities as set out in the Strategic Plan.

Through its community grants scheme, ATC supports groups and societies who might otherwise struggle for funds and whose operations provide positive benefits for residents. They are invited to the Annual Parish Meeting to give feedback and most attend.

Training of Councillors and staff is considered an important investment as it increases skills and knowledge for the benefit of the town.

The quarterly newsletter, the website and social media all keep residents well informed of local issues/news and enables ATC to obtain feedback prior to decision making. ATC also carries out surveys to review services – eg an online survey on play areas was undertaken in September 2023.