

**POLICY, GOVERNANCE & FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Monday, 1 February 2021

At 6.00 pm in the Virtual Meeting Room via Zoom

Present:

Councillor L Ashbourne (Chair)

| | | |
|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Councillors: | J Aitman | A D Harvey |
| | O Collins | M Jones |
| | H Eaglestone | R Smith |
| Officers: | Nicky Cayley | Democratic Services Officer |
| | Adam Clapton | Office Manager |
| | Sharon Groth | Town Clerk |
| Others: | 0 members of the public. | |

F59 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for her absence was received from Cllr Gwatkin.

F60 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllrs Collins and Eaglestone declared an interest in agenda item 13, Property & Legal Matters, as they both sat on the Witney Town Hall Charity.

F61 MINUTES

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2020.

There were no matters arising.

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2020 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

F62 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no members of the public present for this item.

F63 PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS

The Committee received and considered the report of the Office Manager, together with bank reconciliations and statements and a schedule of payments.

RESOLVED:

1. that the report be noted;
2. that the bank reconciliations and bank statements be noted;
3. that the following schedules of payments be approved:

| Cheque No's | In the sum of: | Account |
|---|-----------------------|----------------|
| Cheque 101146, DDs and Standing Orders (October 2020) | £11,288.12 | General CB 1 |
| Cheques 32839—32883, DDs and Standing Orders (October 2020) | £134,574.56 | Imprest CB 2 |
| DD's and Standing Orders (November 2020) | £4,891.74 | General CB 1 |
| Cheques 32884-32918, DDs and Standing Orders (November 2020) | £106,009.78 | Imprest CB 2 |
| DD's and Standing Orders (December 2020) | £8,066.85 | General CB 1 |
| Cheques 32919-32949, DD's and Standing Orders (December 2020) | £131,233.79 | Imprest CB 2 |

F64 **FINANCIAL REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk, containing the recommendations from the spending committees.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted and the recommendations of the spending committees as detailed in the report be approved.

F65 **INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the Internal Audit Report and were pleased that no matters of concern had been raised.

RESOLVED: that the Internal Report be noted.

F66 **GRANTS AND SUBSIDISED LETTINGS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Democratic Services Officer, along with two grant applications; one from the Citizen's Advice West Oxfordshire and a second from Oxford Play Association. Correspondence in thanks of previous grant awards from Witney Mills Cricket Club and Volunteer Link Up were also received.

There was some discussion on the application from the Citizens Advice Bureau as it had applied for £1,000 but the Council had budgeted £2,000. Members agreed to award the organisation the budgeted amount in recognition of the work done in the Covid 19 pandemic and the possibility that it would need to help those being made redundant and those struggling this year. However, it should be made clear that although the grant is higher than requested, there should be no expectation of a certain funding for the following year.

With regard to the application received from Oxford Play Association the Town Clerk pointed out that the Stronger Communities Committee had in fact agreed to roll over the budget from the current year as the play day couldn't get ahead due to the pandemic.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted and that:-

1. Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire be granted the sum of £2, 000; and this grant be awarded under Section 142(2a) of the Local Government Act 1972
2. that Oxford Play Association be granted the sum of £1, 000 [from the 2021/22 budget] for the Play Day scheduled for August; and this grant be awarded under the General Power of Competence.

F67 **ANNUAL TOWN MEETING**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Democratic Services Officer concerning the Annual Town Meeting. With the country in lockdown and no definitive date for the lifting of restrictions members considered how to proceed. The Town Clerk confirmed that whilst last year guidance had been that the meeting did not have to be held, the Government had not set out any guidance for this year.

The Committee agreed that the planned date of 17 March was unrealistic for an in-person meeting and that it would be sensible to move the meeting as late as legally possible – the meeting had to be held by the end of May. The Committee would review exactly how the meeting would be held during the next cycle, in the hope of some clarity and Government guidance being issued.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted and: -

1. that the scheduling of the Annual Town Meeting for 17 March 2021 is cancelled and this is advertised on social media;
2. that the Annual Town Meeting is provisionally scheduled for 26 May 2021 and that the Council consider the options for holding it during the next cycle of meetings.

F68 **CALENDAR OF MEETINGS**

The Committee received and considered the draft calendar of meetings for 2021/22.

The Town Clerk advised notification had been received from the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) that Government legislation to hold virtual meetings would not be extended beyond the 7th May 2021, at this point in time. Members felt the resumption of in-person meetings, given that some councillors and their family members may not have received a full vaccine by that time, was premature.

RESOLVED:

1. that the draft calendar of meetings as presented be approved.
2. That the Town Council writes to the Local MP asking that he presses the Government for an extension to legislation on virtual meetings.

F69 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

RESOLVED: that in accordance with section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, and as extended by Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public, including the press, be excluded from the meeting because of the confidential nature of the following business to be transacted.

F70 **DEBTORS REPORT**

The Committee received and considered a report detailing the Council's debtors prepared by the Office Manager.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

F71 **PROPERTY AND LEGAL MATTERS**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk on property matters which included matters relating to the Town Hall and Madley Park Hall leases, the use of the Council's estates in Witney East for cycling and footpath connectivity, and requests for financial assistance towards rental charges throughout the Covid-19 pandemic from the sports clubs occupying Town Council facilities as tenants

Members discussed each application for financial assistance individually, assessing how the operation of the sports clubs had been affected by the pandemic, and reviewed the financial information supplied.

The report also contained updates on wayleaves and easements, land at Park Road and allotments.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted and: -

1. that the Council accepts the revised rent offered by its landlord the Witney Town Hall Charity for the Town Hall at £15,500 per annum back dated to April 2019;
2. that with regard to the Madley Park Hall lease, the Council agrees to negotiate a new lease up to 2023 on similar terms to the previous one, based on the advice of the Council's professional advisor;
3. that the Council supports the Climate, Biodiversity and Planning Committee's recommendation that the District Council may use its land for footpath and cycle routes from the Witney East Development;
4. that Witney Town Bowls Club's request to defer its loan repayment for six months be agreed;

5. that Witney Mills Bowls Club be granted the financial support as detailed in its grant application;
6. that Witney Range Users' Committee be granted the financial support as detailed in its grant application;
7. that Witney Lawn tennis Club be granted funding as requested to cover the period that the courts have been closed as detailed in its grant application;
8. that West Witney Sports and Social Club be granted the financial support in respect of rental fees only which were due, as detailed in its grant application and equated to the period that the Club had to close due to Covid-19 but no further financial assistance at this stage.
9. that the Town Clerk reviews the 2021-22 fees and charges when the final budget is presented to the Council.

The Committee adjourned at 7.30pm in order to receive minutes of the Personnel Sub Committee and a verbal report of the meeting held earlier that evening. At this point the Democratic Services Officer and the Office Manager left the meeting

F72 **STAFFING MATTERS**

The Committee received and considered the confidential minutes of the meetings held on 30 November 2020, 20 January 2021 circulated prior to the meeting, and also a confidential verbal report of the meeting held earlier in the evening.

RESOLVED: that the confidential minutes of the Personnel Sub Committee held on the 30 November 2020, 20 January 2021 and the confidential verbal report of the meeting held earlier in the evening be noted and the recommendations contained therein be approved.

The Policy, Governance and Finance Committee reconvened at 7.38pm.

The meeting closed at: 7.40 pm

Chair