

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

Held on Monday, 22 November 2021

At 6.00 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor R Smith (Chair)

Councillors:	J Aitman	M Jones
	O Collins	T Ashby (In place of H Eaglestone)
Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
Others:	No members of the public.	

F581 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for their absence were received from Cllrs L Ashbourne, V Gwatkin, H Eaglestone and D Harvey.

Councillor T Ashby was in attendance for Councillor H Eaglestone

F582 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

A personal, non-prejudicial interest was declared by Cllr O Collins in respect of Agenda Item 11 which included grant monitoring details relating to West Oxfordshire Community Transport.

F583 MINUTES

The Committee received the minutes of the meeting held on 27 September 2021.

Minute F497 – The Deputy Town Clerk advised the Committee had agreed to release £500 by way of an annual grant to Witney Town Band but this was not reflected in the minutes.

Minute F497(6) – The Deputy Town Clerk advised correspondence had been received advising no funds would be required towards the Cogges Priory Community Garden at the present time.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the meeting held on 27 September 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

F584 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no members of the public present to address the committee.

F585 **20 MPH SPEED RESTRICTIONS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning requests for 20mph speed restrictions in Witney.

Members were advised Oxfordshire County Council had recently resolved to make the introduction of 20mph speed restrictions easier to apply for through Parish and Town Councils, providing certain criteria was met.

There was agreement this was a positive, progressive step and the Town Council should support the initiative as it was included in its Active Travel Infrastructure Plan. A reduction in speed limits would improve air quality and safety for pedestrians and could result in a better flow of traffic.

It was agreed that a town-wide pilot proposal from the County Council would offer the most benefit; All areas could be included initially with the benefits and drawbacks to residents and businesses being considered. Residential and ring-road areas would need to be looked at differently and there would be unsuitable areas which would need to be exempt from the scheme.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Town Council supports a town-wide 20mph scheme with certain exemptions, to be discussed with Oxfordshire County Council and subject to public consultation, and
3. That, the extent of the scheme and exemptions be delegated to the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee, and
4. That, Oxfordshire County Council officers be invited to the next meeting of that Committee on Tuesday 14th December.

F586 **OPEN SPACES POLICIES**

The Committee received draft policies concerning memorial bench and tree planting requests, as agreed by the Stronger Communities Committee on 15 November 2021.

Members were advised that a request from Stronger Communities had been made to include GDPR statements in both policies and to advise that a book listing memorial and donated trees is viewable by the public.

Resolved:

That, the memorial bench and tree request policies, as agreed by the Stronger Communities Committee with amendments, be approved.

F587 **PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS**

The Committee received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk outlining payment schedules, bank statements and bank reconciliations which are brought to the Policy, Governance & Finance committee as part of the Council's due diligence.

Resolved:

Members noted the report, the bank reconciliations and agreed the following schedule of payments be approved:

Cheque No's	In the sum of:	Account
Cheques 101164 - 101167, DDs and Standing Orders September	£177,637.05	General CB 1
Cheques 33222 - 33274, DDs and Standing Orders September	£95,881.18	Imprest CB 2

F588 **BANK ACCOUNTS & MANDATE**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk/CEO concerning the banking arrangements of the Council.

Members were advised the Council had a complex banking mandate with its current provider and the level of service currently being provided had been disappointing, particularly concerning cheques which could only be verified by the Town Clerk.

The possibility of changing banks had been considered but there were benefits of remaining with the provider and extending the current mandate to include online banking. The inclusion of additional councillors on the mandate and permission for officers to undertake key operational functions, in line with financial regulations, would offer a more resilient service.

Recommended:

1. That, the members of the committee be authorised signatories on Barclays Bank mandates, and
2. That, the Town Clerk is also listed on the bank mandate for the Barclays Banks General and Business Premium Account as being able to deal with transfers between accounts as well as setting up direct debits, and
3. That, the Deputy Town Clerk is set up as a key contact, along with the RFO when appointed as well as the Policy, Governance & Finance Administrator and be able to cash cheques up to £500 at the local Barclays Branch to replenish the Council's petty cash account, and hopefully be able to deal with banking queries, and
4. That, the implementation of online banking with the Council's current banking provider, Barclays Bank PLC, be set up as a matter of urgency.

F589 **ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY 2021-22**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk/CEO concerning the Council's Annual Investment Strategy.

Members recognised the importance of the strategy as part of local authority governance and were pleased that the investments of the Council were held securely by reputable, ethical providers. Members asked that once appointed, the RFO considered social and environmental factors as well as ethical factors in future investment banking.

Recommended:

1. That, the current investment in secure banks be approved, and
2. That, the RFO (once appointed) continues to monitor interest rates to ensure the Council receives the most advantageous interest rates, and
3. That, the RFO (once appointed) considers social, ethical and environmental factors in investment banking, and
4. That, the Annual Investment Strategy 2021/22 be formally approved, subject to ratification at Full Council on 6 December with the above inclusion.

F590 **FINANCIAL REPORT & ASSOCIATED MATTERS**

The Committee received and considered the report and confidential appendix of the Deputy Town Clerk outlining the financial implications of the Council's spending committees and other financial matters.

The Stronger Communities Committee had deferred a budgetary decision on funding for the 2022 Witney Carnival from the Rotary Club of Witney. Income and expenditure details from the 2019 Carnival were received but plans on the 2022 event were at an early stage so no further information on the potential outlay could currently be provided. The Committee was in agreement that the event should be supported by the Town Council but there had been an increased number of worthy claims on the Council's grants fund this year which was likely to continue and the increased figure allocated from an underspend in 2020/21 was regrettably not sustainable in 2022.

Members noted a confidential debtor report and agreed the debts outlined in the report should be recovered.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted, and
2. That, the recommendations of the Council's spending committees as detailed be approved, and
3. That, Witney Town Council budgets £2,100 towards the 2022 Witney Carnival and a grant application form be completed nearer the time to draw on these funds and,
4. That, the confidential debtor report be noted, and
5. That, the Council's sports letting conditions be amended to offer clearer guidance on invoice queries.

F591 **ANNUAL GRANT REQUESTS**

The Committee received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning two annual grant request applications and a confidential update provided by West Oxfordshire Community Transport updating their current position, the Council having provided an annual grant within the fiscal year.

F592 **VOLUNTEER LINK UP**

Resolved:

1. That, the annual grant request of £500 be approved, and
2. That, this grant be awarded under the General Power of Competence from budget line (4162/407) and,
3. That, Volunteer Link-Up be asked to acknowledge the Council's financial contribution in its promotional literature.

F593 **CITIZENS ADVICE WEST OXFORDSHIRE**

Members considered the request from Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire and agreed that as the budget for this grant was £2000, this amount should be awarded due to the additional support required by residents due to Covid-19.

Resolved:

1. That, an annual grant of £2000 be approved and;
2. That, this grant be awarded under Section 142(2a) of the Local Government Act 1972 from budget line (4101/407).
3. That, Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire be asked to acknowledge the Council's financial contribution in its promotional literature.

F594 **REVENUE BUDGET**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk/CEO regarding the Revenue Budget.

Members were advised the draft budgets had been prepared on current activities in what would constitute a normal year and central support and works department recharges had yet to be added.

The Town Clerk advised there would be a virtual budget presentation to the Council on 13 December 2021 and an Extra Ordinary meeting to sign off the budget in early January 2022, and in order to formally declare the Precept for 2022/23.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted, and
2. That, the revised base revenue budget for 2021/22 and the estimated base revenue budgets for 2022/23, be approved in principle, subject to any further necessary adjustments.

F595 **SCHEDULE OF PROPOSED FEES & CHARGES 2022/23**

The Committee received the draft schedule of recreation, public hall and burials fees for 2022/23 as previously agreed by the associated standing committees.

Members were advised the proposed fees included a 3% increase on the current charges which acknowledged the national inflationary rises during the previous year.

Resolved:

That, the schedule of recreation, public hall and burials fees for 2022/23 be approved.

F596 **CAPITAL & SPECIAL REVENUE PROJECTS PROGRAMME**

The Committee received and considered the Capital & Special Revenue Projects Programme for 2021/22 prepared by the Town Clerk/CEO.

Members were advised there were a number of projects included in the programme and posed questions on various budget lines. It would be the decision of the Council which projects could be afforded when the final budget was presented in December.

Recommended:

That, the Capital & Special Revenue Projects Programme be noted.

F597 **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.

Cllr O Collins left the meeting at 7.10pm.

F598 **PROPERTY & LEGAL MATTERS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk/CEO concerning property under the Council's ownership and ongoing legal or commercial communications.

Recommended:

1. That, the confidential report of the Town Clerk/CEO be noted and,
2. That, the revised terms of the lease offered on Park Road Play Area by Cottsway Housing Association be noted and,
3. That, the revised heads of terms for the lease of Raleigh Crescent Play Area be agreed, and
4. That, the Town Clerk/CEO progresses with negotiations concerning the property identified in the report.

F598 (a) TOWN HALL WINDOW REPAIRS & EXTERNAL BUILDING DECORATION

The Committee received and considered the report of the Operations & Estates Advisor concerning the windows at the Town Hall, Witney.

Members were advised the quotes previously received had been reorganised and a new specification for works had been created, following advice from the local conservation office. It was hoped further comparable quotes would be available for the next meeting.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

F599 STAFFING MATTERS

The Committee received and considered the confidential minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee meeting held on 28 October 2021 previously circulated and noted the Town Clerk had assumed the role of RFO until the vacancy could be filled.

Resolved:

That, the confidential minutes of the Personnel Sub-committee held on 28 October 2021 be noted, and the recommendations contained therein approved.

The meeting closed at: 7.45 pm

Chair