

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

Held on Monday, 6 June 2022

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

Present:

Councillor J Aitman (Chair)

Councillors:	O Collins	A D Harvey
	L Duncan	M Jones
	H Eaglestone	R Smith
	V Gwatkin	
Officers:	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Simon Wright	Democratic & Legal Services Officer
Others:	Two members of the public.	

F284 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

F285 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from members or officers.

F286 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

The Chair called for nominations for the position of Vice-Chair of the Committee.

It was proposed and seconded that Councillor Ruth Smith be elected. There being no other nominations it was:

Resolved:

That, Councillor Ruth Smith be elected Vice-Chair of the Committee for the 2022/2023 municipal year.

F287 MINUTES

The Committee received the minutes of the meeting held on 28 March 2022.

Minute F140 – The Town Clerk confirmed that a letter had been sent to West Oxfordshire District Council regarding CCTV. A response had been received and considered by the Stronger Communities Committee and it recommended to this committee the £10k funding be released.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the meeting held on 28 March 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

F288 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The Committee adjourned for this item.

Mr. William Wareing representing Witney Flood Mitigation Group addressed the committee in respect of Agenda Item No. 13 – Emergency Plan

The Committee reconvened following public participation.

The Committee, at the request of the Chair, agreed to take Agenda Item No. 13 before Agenda Item No. 6.

F289 **EMERGENCY PLAN**

Consideration was given to the report of the Maintenance & Environmental Services Officer.

Members welcomed the report and emphasised the need for local authorities to work together and share information. It was noted that the Town Council was not the lead authority for emergency planning but could have a role in providing accommodation during emergencies, maintaining land owned by the Council, staff resources in working hours and grant aid.

The committee considered and supported the main recommendations in the report, and it was noted that recommendation 4 would need to be resolved in exempt session.

Resolved:

1. That, Witney Town Council maintenance staff assisting in an emergency in contracted working hours be included in the emergency plan;
2. That, making Town Council facilities available as places of safety in an emergency be incorporated into the plan; and
3. That, officers be designated to work with Witney Flood Mitigation Group on a grant bid for flood prevention equipment.

F290 **COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The committee considered whether any changes were needed to the current Terms of Reference.

Resolved:

That, no amendments be made to the Terms of Reference.

F291 **OPEN SPACES STRATEGY, COMMITTEE OBJECTIVES AND WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR**

The committee considered the report of the Town Clerk/CEO.

The Town Clerk brought to Members attention OSS Objective EE14, which had been deferred from the Personnel Sub-Committee, and asked what the Council's expectations were around weekend working practices and service delivery. She needed this information to be able to establish what resources were needed in the future.

The Members agreed that the Council wanted a visible presence 7 days per week, and in particular considered Operatives would be checking pitches, preparing the splash pad, dealing with emergencies, ad hoc requests for internments in special circumstances – and general maintenance.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted; and
2. That, a visible presence over 7 days per week be provided as outlined above be supported.

F292 INTERNAL AUDIT - FINAL REPORT 2021/2022

The Committee received and considered the final Internal Audit report for 2021/2022. Members thanked officers for their hard work in respect of the audit and welcomed the positive assurances in each relevant area.

Resolved:

That, the final Internal Audit Report for 2021/2022 be received and noted

F293 ACCOUNTS & AUDIT (ENGLAND) REGULATIONS 2015 - ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN (AGAR) 2021/22

The Committee noted that due to the delay in the production of the AGAR & Financial Statements by the Council's Contract Accountants this item would be deferred to Full Council on 20th June 2022.

F294 PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS

Consideration was given to the report of the Deputy Town Clerk.

It was noted that identified charges included in the report related to transactions associated with the card payment machines used by the Council.

Resolved:

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

Cheques No's	In the sum of	Account
Cheques 101178 & 101181*, DDs, and Standing Orders March 2022	£95,905.05	General CB 1
Cheques 33462-33518, DDs, and Standing Orders March 2022	£172,825.78	Imprest CB 2
Cheques 101182-101183, DDs, and Standing Orders April 2022	£73,910.56	General CB 1
Cheques 33519-33539, DDs, and Standing Orders April 2022	£118,918.95	Imprest CB 2

F295 **FINANCIAL REPORT & ASSOCIATED MATTERS**

The report of the Town Clerk/CEO was considered.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that following the Stronger Communities Committee meeting, Oxford Playhouse had submitted an updated proposal for an event on The Leys in late June at the cost of £1k for two days. Members considered the timescale and publicity for the event and noted that a budget was available. The committee agreed to support the event and noted that it could be accommodated at the same time as the circus on The Leys.

An update was given on works at St Mary's Churchyard and it was resolved to delegate officers to agree the contractor for the works.

Resolved:

1. That, the recommendations of the spending committees as detailed in the report be approved;
2. That, £1k be allocated from the Subsidised Lettings Budget for the Oxford Playhouse - Playhouse Plays Out Tent Tour on The Leys with delegation to officers to finalise the details; and
3. That, delegation be given to the Maintenance & Environmental Services Officer to agree a contractor for works at St Mary's Churchyard.

F296 **GRANTS AND SUBSIDISED LETTINGS**

The committee considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk outlining applications and confidential financial information for Discretionary Grants, Subsidised Lettings and Additional Finance Requests.

Discretionary Grant Applications

Witney Town Band – Members noted that the application was higher than previous years to reflect an increase in costs. The committee supported the request for £660 and that this should be agreed for future years and included in the annual budget accordingly.

Witney Congregational Church – Members noted legislation that precluded providing funds for churches and ecclesiastical charities and that further government guidance was still awaited. The committee discussed the community benefits and suggested that the Witney Town Hall charity may be able to assist.

After discussion it was resolved not to make an award of funding.

Oxfordshire Foster Care Association – The committee noted that the association covered a wider area than Witney, but it did support residents of the town. Members discussed the financial information provided and after discussion agreed to support the application but that it be on a percentage basis to reflect the number of Witney residents being supported. It was proposed and agreed that a grant of £500 be awarded.

Witney Museum & Historical Society – Members expressed support for the museum and the need for increased promotion. It was suggested and agreed that an ongoing grant would also be beneficial. It was proposed that a grant of £500 be awarded and this would be ongoing for future years with the minutes of the society AGM being presented to Council for information. The Council could also assist in advertising the Museum at its offices and at the Corn Exchange.

Subsidised Lettings

Mayor of Witney – The committee supported the request for £510 to hold up to three fundraising events at the Corn Exchange for mayoral charities.

Carry on Dancing Club – The Deputy Town Clerk clarified that the matter had been discussed by the Halls, Cemeteries and Allotments Committee and this had generated the application for consideration. The committee supported the application.

Additional Financial Requests & Matters

Madley Park Hall Trust – The committee noted that the request was the third and final tranche of funding previously agreed for the hall and was set aside in an earmarked reserve. The request for £5k was agreed.

Rotary Club of Witney – The postponement of the Colour Run Event until later in the year was noted.

Resolved:

1. That, in respect of Discretionary Grants witney Town Band be awarded £660 and that this be included at the same rate in the budget for future years;
2. That, no award be made to Witney Congregational Church;
3. That, Oxfordshire Foster Care Association be awarded £500 to reflect the percentage of Witney residents being supported by the organisation;
4. That, Witney Museum & Historical Society be awarded £500 and that this be included at the same rate in the budget for future years with the minutes of the society AGM being presented to the Council for information;
5. That, subsidised lettings be approved for the Mayor of Witney and Carry-on Dancing Club as detailed in the report;
6. That these grants be awarded under the General Power of Competence and that the recipients be asked to acknowledge the Council's financial contribution in their promotional literature;
7. That, the allocation of £5k to Madley Park Hall Trust be approved; and
8. That, the postponement of the Witney Colour Run until later in the year be noted.

F297 **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.

F298 **EMERGENCY PLAN**

The committee considered the confidential appendix to the report.

Members agreed that a more structured out of hours service was required. Discussion ensued regarding financial implications, current staff contracts and options for a new service.

Resolved:

That, a revised emergency call-out and out of hours arrangements be supported and delegated to the Head of Operations to agree a workable procedure and bring back to a future meeting for consideration.

F299 **MAJOR & SPECIAL PROJECTS**

Consideration was given to the report of the Town Clerk/CEO updating on a number of projects.

The committee considered proposals for The Leys Recreation Ground and whether previously allocated funding should be put towards a wider redevelopment scheme whilst retaining the vision for the new Skate Park. The financial implications, links to the Open Spaces Strategy and other funding options were discussed. Members supported the reallocation of funds to assist with match-funding requests.

Members noted an update in respect of West Witney Sports Ground and that discussions were ongoing with West Oxfordshire District Council regarding leisure provision in the town.

Consideration was given to the recommendation of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee in respect of the potential purchase of the building. Members considered the financial implications and the longer-term vision for the site and, after discussion, ratified the recommendation that the purchase should not be pursued.

Members noted the update in respect of the Grounds Maintenance Contract and Burwell Hall Changing Rooms.

Resolved:

1. That, the inclusion of the funds set aside for the skate park and pavilion/sewage and other works identified be reallocated to the funding applications for matched funding towards the Masterplan for the Leys Recreation Ground with the existing plans for the Skate Park being retained;
2. That, the recommendation from the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee not to progress the freehold purchase identified in the report be endorsed; and
3. That, the update in respect of other projects be noted.

F300 **PROPERTY & LEGAL MATTERS**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk concerning property and legal matters.

Members received details of rent negotiations for the Town Hall, Town House and Buttercross together with updates on play areas, playing fields, leases and other land interests.

Resolved:

1. That, the rent increase as identified in the report in respect of the Town Hall, Town House and Buttercross be approved;
2. That, the heads of terms in respect of the freehold transfer of the Waterford Road Play Area in the report be approved; and
3. That, the updates on other property and legal matters be noted.

F301 **STAFFING MATTERS**

The Committee received and considered the confidential minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee meetings held on 9 & 25 May 2022.

A Member raised an incident with an employee that had occurred at one of the recent Jubilee events and was disappointed by the behaviour of elected Members who had been present. There was a discussion on a course of action which the Town Clerk agreed she would look into in consultation with the Leader of the Council.

Resolved:

That, the confidential minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee held on 9 & 25 May 2022 be noted, and the recommendations contained therein approved.

The meeting closed at: 7.56 pm

Chair