

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

Held on Monday, 19 June 2023

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

Present:

Councillor J Aitman (Chair)

Councillors:	O Collins R Smith A Bailey L Cherry	R Crouch J Doughty D Newcombe
Officers:	Sharon Groth Adam Clapton Nigel Warner	Town Clerk Deputy Town Clerk Responsible Financial Officer
Others:	None.	

F321 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

All Members were in attendance at the meeting.

F322 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from members or officers.

F323 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 R Crouch be elected. There being no other nominations it was:

Resolved:

That, Councillor R Crouch be elected Vice-Chair of the Committee for the 2023/2024 municipal year.

F324 MINUTES

The minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 27 March 2023 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 27 March 2023 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

F325 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

F326 **COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk along with the Committee's current terms of reference.

There were no changes suggested to the current terms.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Committee terms of reference as presented be agreed.

F327 **COMMITTEE OBJECTIVES AND WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR**

The Committee received and considered a verbal update from the Town Clerk/C.E.O. concerning its objectives and work programme for the forthcoming year.

A copy of the Council's Parks & Open Spaces Strategy and a list of earmarked reserves (EMR's), set aside for specific projects were tabled. Following requests to each standing committee during this meeting cycle, this was an opportunity for Members to scrutinise any further objectives or projects for the whole Council which would help develop a four-year strategic plan.

There were questions from Members on EMR's for election expenses, the Corn Exchange lift replacement, community infrastructure, fixed assets and St Mary's Church wall repairs as well as the difference between the Council's capital finance reserve and its rolling capital funds, which were clarified by Officers.

The Committee was pleased to see so many projects underway including management of Windrush Place sports pitches/pavilion, responsibility for sports pitches at Madley Park, a new Pesticides Policy, an updated Safeguarding Policy, and refurbishment of West Witney Sports Clubhouse, but were also keen to see more reserves for the auspices of the Stronger Communities Committee to provide targeted spending for residents.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the current objective and work programme be agreed and,
3. That, the projects above be noted to help update the historic Parks & Open Spaces Strategy and a new four-year strategic plan.

F328 **INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT 2022-23**

The Committee received the final update report for 2022-23 from the Council’s internal Auditor’s, Auditing Solutions Ltd.

The RFO advised Members this was an important part of internal financial control at the Council. The Auditor’s checked key areas of financial management and that processes were in place, being adhered to and ensured relevant documentation was in order, in line with legislation.

Members were pleased to note the Auditor’s had found no areas of concern and thanked Officers for their diligence.

Resolved:

That, the final internal audit report for 2022-23 be noted.

F329 **PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS**

The Committee received the report of the Responsible Financial Officer 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.

The RFO explained that under the Council’s financial regulations and standing orders, there were robust controls and measures which ensured transparency for Members and the public; these documents were provided in response to those controls.

A member raised a query on waste contracts to which the Town Clerk advised that the Council entered into the most competitive of those submitted.

Resolved:

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

Cheque Numbers	In the sum of:	Account
Cheque 101204-101209, DDs and Standing Orders March 2023	£1,091,128.43	General CB 1
Cheques 34002 - 34057, DDs, BACS and Standing Orders March 2023	£155,986.92	Imprest CB 2
Cheques 101210 – 101215, DDs and Standing Orders April 2023	£1,092,981.85	General CB 1
DDs, BACS and Standing Orders April 2023	£133,735.58	Imprest CB 2

F330 **GRANTS & SUBSIDISED LETTINGS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk regarding four requests for grant/subsidised letting assistance.

Members were generally supportive of grants which assisted asylum seekers but were conscious there were other groups offering activities and other grant pots available. A request from the bike project which would result in a working bike for those involved in the scheme was agreed but further information was required concerning the Time for Art application.

With regard to an application from Witney Ringing Society towards the maintenance of St Mary's bells, Member's debated the community benefit and the historic importance but noted the Council would be contributing financially heavily to the parish clock under its statutory obligations. There were potentially other funding streams open to the church and society in their endeavours for the bells.

Members noted the grants and subsidised lettings already awarded to Volunteer Link Up, Witney Forum and towards a NHS 75th Anniversary event and agreed to a further letting request from the Mayor to hold charity fundraising events in the Council's public halls.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, a discretionary grant award for £500 towards St Mary's Church Civic Drinks reception to mark the 75th Anniversary of the NHS be noted and,
3. That, a discretionary grant of £800 be awarded to Windrush Bike Project and,
4. That, further information is required from Time for Art before a decision on the application can be made and,
5. That, a request from Witney Ringing Society be declined per the above conversation, but further funding avenue streams be offered and,
6. That, subsidised letting awards of £147 for Volunteer Link Up and £42.35 for Witney Forum are noted and,
7. That, subsidised letting to the value of £294 be awarded to the Mayor of Witney for charity fundraising in 2023-24 and,
8. 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 and during the event and,
9. That, a further breakdown of spending costs is requested from APCAM relating to their Youth Services Grant Award for 2022-23 and,
10. That, an upper limit of £10,000 from the Youth Services budget 2023-24 be earmarked towards a gap in detached youth work for the summer holiday period, the exact amount being delegated to town council representatives at a meeting with stakeholders in the coming weeks.

F331 FINANCIAL REPORT & ASSOCIATED MATTERS

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) which contained detailed income and expenditure statements for the whole of the Council's approved budgets and management accounts for the period 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023, along with an update on the Council's investments.

Also covered were the financial implications from the spending Committees and a proposed charge for engraved pebbles at the Children's Windrush Cemetery Memorial Garden.

Members were pleased the Council's accounts were very healthy; they were supportive of funding an Oxford Playhouse event at the Leys from the subsidised letting budget and in inviting

providing funds for 'Nature NOW' from the Youth Services Grant, subject to an application for £2,400 being received.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and the management accounts for the Council for the period 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023 be approved and,
2. That, the Council's investments as detailed in the report be noted and,
3. That, the recommendations of the spending committees as detailed in the report be agreed including funds towards an Oxford Playhouse event and funds towards NOW and,
4. That, the proposed charges for children's memorial garden stone engraving be agreed.

F332 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved:

That in accordance with section (1(2) of the Public Bodies (admission 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.

F333 ADDITIONAL GROUNDS MAINTENANCE REQUESTS

The Committee received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning additional grounds maintenance requests.

There was agreement the issue of amenity land ownership in Witney was complex and residents were often left frustrated by lack of action when maintenance was requested. A wider project of dealing with the issue was certainly an aspiration of this Council within its term of office, so a decision at this point would be a starting point, but not solve the problem quickly.

The Chair advised the District Council was also beginning to audit its estate and grounds maintenance so discussions at an early stage would be beneficial in resolving some of the simpler issues.

There were concerns regarding the cost of taking on additional pieces of land but officers confirmed costs would be sought before any agreement was made.

Resolved:

1. That, the confidential report be noted and,
2. That, subject to cost, the Town Council will maintain any unregistered parcels of land with the Land Registry which have fallen into disrepair and are reported to the Council, providing they are small enough and in the vicinity of other maintained land and,
3. That, subject to cost, the Town Council seeks to register these parcels of land subject to legal and insurance advice and,
4. That, subject to cost and negotiation, the Council will contact former developers, where land is registered to them historically to see whether the Town Council can adopt the land, as they are reported and,

5. That, the Town Council takes a pro-active approach in contacting other authorities on behalf of residents where maintenance is required on their land and,
6. That, Officers engage with the District Council regarding problematic and obvious grounds maintenance areas maintained by the two authorities.

Cllr O Collins left the meeting at 19.50pm

F334 STAFFING MATTERS

The Committee received the minutes of the Personnel Sub Committee meeting held on 17 April 2023 and a verbal update from the meeting held earlier in the evening.

Resolved:

That, the confidential minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee meeting held on 17 April 2023 and the verbal update from the meeting held earlier on 19 June be noted, and the recommendations contained therein approved.

F335 PROPERTY & LEGAL MATTERS

The Committee received a confidential verbal update from the Town Clerk concerning property and legal matters.

Members were advised that the Council's Property Agents were dealing with negotiations at The Leys, West Witney Tennis Courts, and West Witney Sports & Social Club. Discussions were also due to be held with Madley Park Hall Trust regarding a new lease and the future of the facility.

In addition, the Council was still in negotiations with West Oxfordshire District Council for play areas at Madley Park, Raleigh Crescent, Waterford Lane and Unterhaching Park. They were at varying stages of completion and work was required in some areas before the transfer could take place, as was discussion on the Madley Park playing fields.

Resolved:

That, the confidential update be noted.

F336 MAJOR STRATEGIC PROJECTS

The Committee received a confidential verbal update on major and strategic projects being undertaken by the Council.

Members were advised a tender for the refurbishment of the Leys Skate Park had been published in the previous week, after officers had worked closely with Courtside Hubs CIC to meet the Leys Masterplan timelines. Additional funds had been provided by Courtside CIC and several grants had been applied for to offer the best possible outcome for users.

The Town Clerk also advised that the Community Ownership Fund had recently amended its criteria so town and parish councils could apply for grants for dilapidated buildings, or where a service was coming to an end/no longer available. The next deadline for applications was 12th July so Members were asked if there were any projects they would like to pursue with this in mind.

Resolved:

That, the confidential update be noted.

The meeting closed at: 8.00 pm

Chair