

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

Held on Monday, 5 February 2024

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

Present:

Councillor J Aitman (Chair)

| | | |
|--------------|---|---|
| Councillors: | R Crouch O Collins R Smith | J Doughty D Newcombe G Meadows |
| Officers: | Adam Clapton Sharon Groth Derek Mackenzie Nigel Warner Adam Cook | Deputy Town Clerk Town Clerk Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk Responsible Financial Officer Project Officer |
| Others: | No members of the public. Councillor Geoff Doughty Councillor James Robertshaw Councillor Thomas Ashby | |

F67 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor L Cherry (by previously agreed dispensation).

F68 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor O Collins declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 13 as he was an unpaid Director for West Oxfordshire Community Transport.

Councillor T Ashby declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 13 as he was a member of the Trustee board of Buttercross Scouts.

There were no other declarations from Members or Officers

F69 MINUTES

The minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 20 November 2023 were received.

P621 – Resolution 4 – In answer to a members query the Responsible Financial Officer advised that feedback is planned for a future meeting.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 20 November 2023 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

F70 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

F71 **COUNCIL STRATEGIC VISION & OBJECTIVES**

The Committee received the report of the Town Clerk/CEO along with a draft document from the previous administration tabled at the meeting.

A member asked that consideration be given to include “gender reassignment” in point 6 of the mission statement. All members were in agreement.

The Town Clerk asked members to take time following the meeting to fully digest the document and to provide any comments directly to her via email.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the inclusion of “gender reassignment” be included in the Mission Statement and,
3. That, members to provide comments to the Town Clerk should they be minded.

F72 **OXFORDSHIRE COUNCILS CHARTER**

The Committee received the Draft Charter document which had been received requesting feedback from Oxfordshire County Council.

The Chair outlined the charters aims, the main one being to get “councils working together” having attended a briefing at an Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils (OALC) meeting. She also reported that West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) were due to meet the following day along with many smaller parish councils to discuss the charter further and share knowledge.

Members were encouraged to review the charter and provide individual feedback prior to the closing date of 11 February 2024.

Resolved:

1. That, the correspondence and the Chairs verbal update be noted and,
2. That, members to submit an individual response should they be minded.

F73 PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS

The Committee received the report of the Responsible Financial Officer with the accompanying payment schedules, bank statements and reconciliations.

The Town Clerk advised members that the mandate to allow for greater simplified access for the operation of the council banking was nearing completion.

Resolved:

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

| Cheque Numbers | In the sum of: | Account |
|--|-----------------------|----------------|
| DDs and Standing Orders October 2023 | £4,315.95 | General CB 1 |
| DDs, BACS and Standing Orders October 2023 | £126,802.46 | Imprest CB 2 |
| Cheques 101224-101229, DDs and Standing Orders November 2023 | £98,650.20 | General CB 1 |
| Cheques 34400-34453, DDs, BACS and Standing Orders November 2023 | £203,763.43 | Imprest CB 2 |
| Cheque 101230, DDs and Standing Orders December 2023 | £52,440.68 | General CB 1 |
| Cheques 34454-33497, DDs, BACS and Standing Orders and cancelled cheques December 2023 | £171,465.89 | Imprest CB 2 |

F74 ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO).

Members were pleased to see the inclusion of the statement in respect of Sustainable Investments and look forward to receiving further details on these as agreed at a future meeting.

The RFO confirmed to members that all long-term investments were held with Churches, Charities and Local Authorities (CCLA) Investment Management Limited who invested funds in to sustainable investments.

All members were in agreement with approving the Annual Investment Strategy.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the current investment in secure banks is approved, and,
3. That, the revised Annual Investment Strategy be approved.

F75 **ANNUAL TOWN MEETING**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Committee Clerk.

The Chair provided a summary of the meeting explaining to the newer members that the meeting was a public meeting for the electors of Witney to speak about any issues they have in the town and that it was a non-political meeting.

Members discussed the options for layout of the hall, opting for Option two as this worked well at the previous year's meeting and agreed it was more welcoming to sit around tables rather than have a top table of councillors sitting in a line facing the attendees. All members were in agreement.

Members welcomed the idea of grant recipient organisations being invited to the meeting, and for Café 1863 to be open to serve non-alcoholic drinks. Members agreed unanimously.

Members were encouraged to promote the meeting via all outlets. Officers would be advertising via posters, social media and printed press.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, Option 2 be used for the layout and,
3. That, local grant recipients are invited to attend.

F76 **CALENDAR OF MEETINGS**

The Committee received the draft calendar of Meetings for the 2024/25 council year.

The Mayor, Cllr O Collins asked that consideration be given to leave the Annual Council Meeting (ACM) set for the 15 May 2024 as he had a Mayoral event planned for 10 May 2024 meaning that if the ACM was held prior, he would be unable to attend in his full mayoral capacity.

Officers explained that holding the ACM on 15 May would have the effect of not allowing for a break in meetings from May to August however they would reconsider options and report back to Council.

Resolved:

That, Officers revisit the draft calendar for presentation at the meeting of the Council on 19th February 2024.

F77 **FINANCE REPORT**

Members received and considered the written report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) along with a verbal summary of the report.

No questions arose from members, and all were unanimously in agreement with the recommendations made in the report.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the outsourcing of hanging basket care is approved and,
3. That, the report on Investment Returns is noted and,
4. That, the Fire Reinstatement Assessment of Council property for insurance purposes is noted and,
5. That, Zurich Municipal continue as the Councils insurance provider till 31 March 2026.

F78 FINANCIAL MATTERS REFERRED FROM SPENDING COMMITTEES

The Committee received the written report of the Deputy Town Clerk (DTC).

The DTC also provided a verbal update regarding the recommendations from the Climate Biodiversity & Planning Committee to purchase a winch for tree removal at a cost of £2,500 and for £8,000 to be sought from the General Reserve to allow for river de-silting works.

Members were also pleased to be updated on the progress of the Bright Futures detached Youth Service, the DTO advised that the agreement had been signed earlier that day and the first grant instalment had been made.

Resolved:

That, the written report and verbal update be noted, and the recommendations of the spending Committees be approved.

F79 GRANTS & SUBSIDISED LETTINGS

The Committee received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk.

The Committee considered Discretionary Grant Applications for the 2023/24 financial year from Witney Town Band, Witney Day Centre, Broadhill Pre-School, Oxfordshire Mind and Life Education Wessex & Thames Valley and supported these awards unanimously.

Members considered the request from Buttercross Scouts and agreed unanimously that a grant of £3,500 should be awarded. Officers were asked to provide details of the West Oxfordshire District Councils Westhive grant scheme as it was believed this would be a good avenue for the Scouts to access the additional funds they seek.

The Committee was unanimously in agreement of the request from the Mayor of Witney for a subsidised let of the Corn Exchange for an additional charity event.

The Committee further considered Discretionary Grant Applications for the 2024/25 financial year from Nature Now however thought the request exposed the council to risk if the sessions were not utilised. Members unanimously agreed that one set of six session should be granted.

Members also considered additional Grant Awards for Witney Carnival, Oxfordshire Play Association these requested grants were unanimously approved.

Members then considered the request to increase the annual grant provided to West Oxfordshire Community Transport. Members unanimously agreed the increase of £2,500 from £21,000 to £23,500 with a new three-year fixed agreement. The Town Clerk confirmed that this would continue to be paid monthly to WOCT.

Members were pleased to receive correspondence from Volunteer Link-Up thanking them for a £2,000 grant award.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the sum of £500, be awarded to Witney Town Band (Training Band and,
3. That, the sum of £3,500, be awarded to Buttercross Scout Group and,
4. That, the sum of £500, be awarded to Witney Day Centre and,
5. That, the sum of £500, be awarded to Broadhill Pre-School and,
6. That, the sum of £500, be awarded to Oxfordshire Mind and,
7. That, the sum of £310, be awarded to Life Education Wessex & Thames Valley and,
8. That, the sum of £10,000 be approved for Witney Music Festival and,
9. That, the sum of £1,000 be approved for Oxfordshire Play Association and,
10. That, a grant of £2,400 be approved for Nature Now/Where the Fruit is and,
11. That, the subsidised lettings application for the Mayor of Witney (£147) be approved and,
12. That, the grant for WOCT be increased to £23,500 annually for a three-year term from 1 April 2024 and,
13. That, the grant of £2,100 be approved for Witney Carnival and,
14. That, the grant of £1,000 be approved for Oxfordshire Play Association and,
15. 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,
16. That, the correspondence from Volunteer Linkup be noted.

Cllr O Collins left the meeting between 7:20pm and 7:28pm whilst the grant application for West Oxfordshire Community Transport (WOCT) was considered.

F80 MAJOR STRATEGIC PROJECTS

The Committee received and considered the written report of the Project Officer along with a verbal update on current projects.

Members heard that the tender pack was being completed for the proposed improvements work at West Witney Sports & Social Club (WWSCC) and were particularly pleased to hear that Officers were planning to apply for Grant Funding via the Community Ownership Fund which could reduce the financial commitment of the council to the project.

Members also heard that Courtside anticipate commencement of the Leys Masterplan by early March with an anticipated completion in Summer 2024.

The leader of the council reminded members that it was resolved that the planters that had been located at the far end of the High Street were to be relocated to The Leys and asked that Officers progress this as soon as possible.

Resolved:

1. That, the written report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the High Street planters are relocated at the earliest opportunity.

F81 **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.

F82 **CORN EXCHANGE - 1863 CAFÉ & BAR STOCKTAKE**

The Committee received the January 2024 stocktake report for the 1863 Bar & Café along with a confidential verbal update from the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO).

Members were pleased to hear there was no cause for concern and the RFO provided a summary and explanation of the results of the stocktake and the actions being taken by the RFO to ensure that the reports were accurate in future.

These reports would continue to be provided to members as they were received so as to ensure that members were kept informed. The Town Clerk/CEO reminded members of the reasons why some items are provided and discussed in confidential session and asked that members are mindful of this.

Resolved:

1. That, the stocktake report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, members are reminded of the necessity of confidential agenda items.

F83 **PROPERTY & LEGAL MATTERS**

The Committee received the confidential written report of the Town Clerk/C.E.O.

Members were pleased to hear the completion of the transfer of Unterhaching Park and contribution from West Oxfordshire District Council of £30,000 as a commuted sum had been received and placed in an earmarked reserve.

Members also welcomed the update on the Council works depot and were pleased that Officers had prepared a plan to move once the redevelopment of the Leys commences.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

F84 **STAFFING MATTERS**

The Committee received and considered the confidential minutes of the Personnel Sub Committee meetings held on 11 January 2024 and 30 January 2024.

Resolved:

That, the confidential minutes of the Personnel Sub Committee meetings held on 11 January 2024 and 30 January 2024 be noted, and the recommendations contained therein be approved.

The meeting closed at: 7.58 pm

Chair