

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

Held on Monday, 21 November 2022

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

Present:

Councillor J Aitman (Chair)

Councillors:	O Collins H Eaglestone	V Gwatkin R Smith
Officers:	Adam Clapton Sharon Groth Derek Mackenzie	Deputy Town Clerk Town Clerk Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
Others:	1 members of the public.	

F589 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Jones and D Harvey.

F590 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from members or officers.

F591 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 3 October 2022 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 3 October 2022 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

F592 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Committee heard from a resident of Riverside Gardens in respect of agenda item 9.

F593 DISCRETIONARY GRANT REQUEST - RIVERSIDE GARDENS SANDBAG STORE

With the permission of the Chair, this item was moved up the agenda so the member of public could hear the discussion and outcome.

The committee received and discussed the written report of the Operations Manager.

Members agreed with the purchase of a sandbag store provided a grant application was submitted to the council by the residents, they asked that assistance is provided to Councillor Andrew Cole in the purchase of the additional store to ensure that these were ordered at the most beneficial cost and installed together at the earliest opportunity.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the purchase of a sandbag store is agreed to the value of £2,200 before VAT subject to receipt of a completed grant application form and,
3. That, this be awarded under the General Power of Competence and that the recipients be asked to acknowledge the Council's financial contribution in the future and,
4. That, officers assist District County Councillor Coles in the procurement of the other sandbag store

F594 **STANDING ORDERS – 2022 REVIEW**

The Committee received the written and verbal report of the Deputy Town Clerk explaining the proposed changes to Standing Orders in line with legislation and best practice, for consideration by members.

Members discussed the retention of meeting recordings, Standing Order 11g, it was agreed that these recordings should be kept for the purposes of minute writing but need not be retained after the minutes of that meeting were duly agreed and signed by the Chair. The Deputy Town Clerk reminded members of the importance of raising discrepancies in the minutes when they were presented for approval.

In respect of Standing Order 16a, members asked that this is reworded to say that members were welcome to stand. The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that this is due to respecting other members and would affect other standing orders such as those that require silence if the Chair rises.

The Deputy Town Council confirmed that a decision does not need to be taken on adopting the revised Standing Orders until the February cycle of meetings, therefore members have time to consider the proposed changes further once presented to Full Council on 6 December.

Resolved:

That, the report and verbal update be noted.

F595 **PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS**

The Committee received and considered the financial report showing figures for items under its remit for the last quarter, provided by the Deputy Town Clerk.

The Deputy Town Clerk answered questions from members relating to the payment for the Corn Exchange pavement licence as it was believed this would be free this year and the description of items listed. On the latter it was advised the accounts system would only allow a certain number of characters.

Members were also advised that quarterly stocktakes were carried out in the Corn Exchange to mitigate risk in relation to supplier costs at the 1863 Café bar..

The Town Clerk advised members that the multiple transfers of £1.5m showing on the statement related to a transfer between internal accounts. Barclays Bank were having internal processing issues and were hoping to resolve imminently.

Resolved:

1. That, the current financial position be noted.
2. That, the cheque payments to WODC for the Corn Exchange pavement licence would not be presented for payment.

F596 ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY 22-23

The Town Clerk advised this item would be deferred to the next Policy, Governance & Finance meeting on 30 January 2023 due to the time spent on budget commitments.

F597 FINANCIAL REPORT & ASSOCIATED MATTERS

The Committee received the joint report of the Deputy Town Clerk and Town Clerk/CEO.

The Deputy Town Clerk gave a verbal update to explain that a Fire Safety Strategy was needed for the Corn Exchange once the retractable seating was installed, further quotes were awaited in addition to the one received but the amount of £2,750 would be the likely cost.

Members discussed the awarding of an additional grant amount of £100s to Witney Rotary Club in respect of the Christmas Light switch on event and also the annual £2,000 grant award to Citizens Advice (Witney). Members agreed that these awards should be made due to the community benefit.

Members discussed the Burwell Hall toilet refurbishment; it was agreed that the proposal put forward by the Operations Manager was a good solution within the budget constraints that exist.

Resolved:

1. That, the report, and verbal updates be noted and,
2. That, the recommendations of the spending committees as detailed in the report be approved and,
3. That, the Council employs a company to complete a fire strategy and,
4. That, Witney Rotary Club be awarded an additional £100 towards the cost of the Christmas Light switch on event and,
5. That, this be awarded under the General Power of Competence and that the recipients be asked to acknowledge the Council's financial contribution in the future and,
6. That, the annual grant of £2,000 be approved to Citizens Advice (Witney) and,
7. That, this grant be awarded under Section 142(2a) of the Local Government Act 1972 from budget line (4101/407)
8. That, repairs to Burwell Hall Toilets to be carried out by the council works team within the £12,000 allocated budget.

F598 **SCHEDULE OF PROPOSED FEES & CHARGES 23-24**

The Committee discussed the proposed increase to fees for Halls, Sports and Cemeteries.

Members agreed that the 10% increase was in line with similar increases nationally and were needed to protect the council as costs continue to increase. also, It was right that the increase be the same across all of the council services so as not to favour one over another.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that the Corn Exchange Working Party would discuss an additional level of charge specifically for the hire of the Corn Exchange for local group performance groups at its meeting on 24 November 2022. This fee, if approved would be added to the Schedule of Public Hall charges.

Even with the 10% increase, members noted that sports hire charges would still be subsidised as the Council's costs to maintain the sports facilities was much greater than the charges made.

Resolved:

That, the 10% increase to the council Schedule of fees and charges is applied.

F599 **REVENUE BUDGET - REVISED 22-23, ESTIMATES 23-24**

The Committee received the report and verbal update of the Town Clerk.

In response to a question from a member the Town Clerk confirmed that the Corn Exchange café staff were not usually engaged in other work within the Hall other than the occasional locking up duty. The activity in the Corn Exchange was picking up with the increases of events in the schedule after the Covid Pandemic and that it was important to remember the community benefit the Corn Exchange provided, the council had received some great feedback regarding the return of events.

Members were pleased to hear that the Town Clerk had managed to limit any draft precept increase within the agreed budget parameters

Resolved:

That, the report and verbal update be noted

F600 **REVENUE GROWTH, SPECIAL REVENUE AND CAPITAL PROJECTS**

The Committee received a verbal update from the Town Clerk to confirm that she was still working on this, and it would be provided in the special Council budget meeting on 12 December 2022.

F601 **VEHICLE REPLACEMENT**

The Committee received the report of the Operation Manager.

Members understood the pressing need for a vehicle. They ideally wished to procure a further electric vehicle to enhance the fleet, however they recognised the limitations in terms of loads and carrying so deferred the decision to the Chair of the Climate, Biodiversity & planning

Committee for her to discuss and understand the options open to the Council with the Operations Manager.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, discussion on what vehicle should be purchased be delegated to the Operations Manager in consultation with the Chair of the Climate, Biodiversity & planning Committee.

F602 **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.

F603 **MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT**

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

Members were pleased to see the draft of the agreement and how it was a positive step towards building a better relationship with the Witney Music Festival (WMF) organisers.

Members asked that the agreement was amended to ensure clear understanding that the free hire of They Leys was for the main WMF weekend only and that any additional use would be chargeable.

Also, members would like to see further year-round promotion by both parties and acknowledgement of the Council's contribution in the week of the main festival.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the agreement is updated reflecting the above comments and sent for review by WMF and,
3. That, decision to be made on final agreement at a meeting of the Full Council in January 2023.

F604 **TOWN HALL EXTERNAL DECORATION**

The committee received the report of the Operation Manager

Members agreed the work to the external sections of the Corn Exchange was required under the Council's obligations to Witney Town Charity as Landlords of the building. Members agreed to delegate the selection of a new contractor to the Operations Manager.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the selection of the contractor be delegated to the Operations Manager within the allocated budget.

F605 MAJOR STRATEGIC PROJECTS

The Committee received the confidential written report and verbal update from the Town Clerk.

Members discussed the Leys Masterplan and were happy with an agreement in principle to pledge £250,000 as matched funding to enable Courtside Hubs CIC to apply for a substantial grant. Members stipulated the £250,000 would only be paid if the grant application was successful. Subject to further discussion, members also agreed to waive historic utility charges to assist the fundraising for the project.

Regarding Burwell Hall members discussed and agreed to proceed with a replacement gas boiler. There was little support to indicate a Fuel Cell CHP boiler would be the best option given the sporadic use of the Hall and limited case studies

The Town Clerk updated members on discussions with the Chair of West Witney Sports & Social Club.

Members discussed the ownership of the pitches and pavilion being provided at Windrush Place. The Committee requested that it is made clear to WODC that the council was happy for the sports pitch and pavilion to be transferred to the council.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, £250,000 be agreed in principle subject to a successful grant application by Courtside Hubs and,
3. That, historic utility charges for Courtside Hubs be waived to assist with fundraising, subject to further discussion and,
4. That, A new efficient gas boiler be installed at Burwell Hall and,
5. That, Town Clerk to follow up with WWSCC with a request for progress and,
6. That, Town Clerk corresponds with WODC that the town council wishes to take responsibility for Windrush Place sports pitches.

F606 PROPERTY & LEGAL MATTERS

The Town Clerk had nothing to report.

F607 STAFFING MATTERS

The Committee received the confidential minutes of the Personnel Sub Committee meeting held on 26 October 2022, which had been circulated ahead of the meeting.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee meeting held on 26 October 2022 be noted and the recommendations contained therein be approved.

The meeting closed at: 7.48 pm

Chair