

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

**Held on Monday, 27 March 2023**

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

**Present:**

Councillor J Aitman (Chair)

|              |                 |  |
|--------------|-----------------|--|
| Councillors: | O Collins       | V Gwatkin  |
|              | L Duncan        | M Jones  |
|              | H Eaglestone    | R Smith  |
| Officers:    | Nicky Cayley    | Project Officer                                    |
|              | Adam Clapton    | Deputy Town Clerk                                  |
|              | Sharon Groth    | Town Clerk   |
|              | Derek Mackenzie | Senior Administrative Officer &<br>Committee Clerk |
|              | Nigel Warner    | Responsible Financial Officer                      |
| Others:      | None.           |  |

**F153 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor D Harvey.

**F154 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest from members or officers.

**F155 MINUTES**

The minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 30 January 2023 were received.

Comments were made on two items.

F69 – A member expressed how pleased they were to see the partnership with Witney Music Festival finally in place.

F70 – Request to return Christmas Light, this was with the Operations Manager to resolve.

**Resolved:**

That, the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 30 January 2023 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

F156 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

F157 **BURWELL HEATING SYSTEM**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Project Officer regarding the replacement boiler for Burwell Hall, brought up the agenda with the express permission of the Chair.

The replacement of the boiler has been discussed on a number of occasions by various committees and a final decision was now needed.

Members raised numerous questions regarding the proposed boilers effectiveness and suitability along with it being new technology. The Project Officer confirmed the use of a Fuel-Cell boiler would ensure the council was working towards its target of carbon neutrality by 2028 and that though the technology was not widespread in the UK it is very popular overseas. The supplier had assured her the boiler was suitable for the size of building.

The Project officer further explained that the Fuel Cell boiler would meet the demands for heating and produce around 50% of the current electricity use of the hall. A built in "mini boiler" would deal with any additional on demand requirements needed for hall users.

It was proposed that the Committee proceed with the procurement of a Micro Fuel Cell Boiler for Burwell Hall, therefore rescinding the resolution contained in minute no. F605 of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee on 21 November 2022 to install a replacement gas boiler. The motion passed, in line with Standing Order 23(a) with the voting as follows:

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| In Favour   | 6 |
| Against     | 1 |
| Abstentions | 0 |

**Recommended:**

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the council proceeds with the purchase of a Micro Fuel Cell (Viessman Vitocalour PT2) to be installed in Burwell Hall.

*The Project Officer left on the conclusion of this item.*

F158 **FINANCIAL REGULATIONS REVIEW**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer along with the amended Financial Regulations.

A member raised a question in respect of the removal of the definition of "material" from page 8. The RFO explained the definition was too prescriptive and removing it would reduce the time taken to produce reporting when small monetary amounts are involved.

All members were in favour of the adoption of the amended Financial Regulations.

**Recommended:**

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the amended financial regulations be adopted by the Full Council on 17 April 2023 and,
3. That, the financial regulations be reviewed by 20 April 2025 and regularly thereafter.

F159 **OPEN WATER POLICY**

The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed this policy was not ready for presentation to the Committee. It would be added for consideration at a future meeting.

F160 **METAL DETECTING POLICY**

The Committee received and considered a draft Metal Detecting Policy on town council owned land.

No questions or comments arose from the members.

**Recommended:**

That, the Metal Detecting Policy be adopted.

F161 **INTERNAL AUDIT - SECOND INTERIM REPORT 2022-23**

The Committee considered the Interim Audit Report 2022-23 from the Council's internal Auditors, Auditing Solutions Limited.

Members welcomed the report highlighting there were no areas of concern raised, and in response to a question it was confirmed that the auditor does review the council processes as part of the reviews carried out.

**Resolved:**

That, the Interim Audit Report 2022-23 from the Council's internal auditors be noted.

F162 **EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERNAL CONTROL: CORPORATE & FINANCIAL RISK ASSESSMENT 2022/23**

Consideration was given to the report of the Responsible Financial Officer regarding the Risk Management Policy and Corporate & Financial Risk Assessment for 2022-23.

In response to a question raised by the Mayor it was confirmed that by signing the risk assessment she was signing on behalf of the Council to confirm it had received and considered the document under its financial management obligations, it did not hold her individually responsible as the Council was a corporate body with its own legal identity. Insurance was in place to cover the Council against loss or damage caused as a result of its actions unless these were proved to be reckless.

The RFO confirmed there were a few small amendments to be made to the document such as the updating of some officer job titles, these were outlined to members. As the amendments were minor, members were in agreement for these to be made post meeting.

The Deputy Town Clerk also confirmed that any risks identified by officers are detailed in their reports to committees so that members are kept informed as these arise.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the report be noted and
2. That, the Risk Management Policy & Corporate Risk Assessment for the financial year 2022-23 be endorsed.

**F163 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.

**Resolved:**

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

| <b>Cheque Numbers</b>  | <b>In the sum of:</b> | <b>Account</b> |
|--|-----------------------|----------------|
| Cheque 101200, DDs and Standing Orders January 2023                | £123,285.42           | General CB 1   |
| Cheques 33915 - 33941, DDs, BACS and Standing Orders January 2023  | £157,336.97           | Imprest CB 2   |
| Cheques 101201 – 101203, DDs and Standing Orders February 2023     | £150,562.13           | General CB 1   |
| Cheques 33942 - 34001, DDs, BACS and Standing Orders February 2023 | £149,933.97           | Imprest CB 2   |

**F164 BANKING ARRANGEMENTS - AUTHORISED OFFICERS**

The Committee noted the request asking that the Deputy Town Clerk, Adam Clapton and Responsible Financial Officer, Nigel Warner be approved as authorised officers in order to deal with banking queries and be able to cash cheques up to £500 for petty cash purposes.

All members approved and recognised this would ensure business continuity of the Council moving forward.

The Town Clerk also advised the Mayor would be required to be added to the bank mandate, even given the short time that remained of her term as mayor to facilitate a smooth transfer to the new Council administration in May.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the Deputy Town Clerk, Adam Clapton and Responsible Financial Officer, Nigel Warner be approved as authorised officers for banking and,
2. That, the Town Mayor is added to the bank mandate.

F165 **GRANTS & SUBSIDISED LETTINGS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk regarding three requests for grant assistance.

**Clean Slate** – This grant was deferred from the Grant funding requests considered earlier in the year so that additional supporting documentation could be provided to members. Members discussed the importance of providing support to the rising issue of domestic violence. A vote was called for with the result being:

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| For        | 6 |
| Against    | 1 |
| Abstention | 0 |

**Rotary Club of Witney** – Members received a request for £500 towards the organisation of the Colour Run event on 21 May 2023. Again, as with the Fire walk event request this came at very short notice and outside of the usual Grant consideration period.

Members discussed the application and agreed to grant an amount of £310, this being the rounded difference between the £500 requested and the £196 awarded by way of a subsidised let of the Corn Exchange earlier this month.

**Witney Photo Group** – Members discussed the request for a subsidised let of the Corn Exchange. All members were in agreement with the request.

Lastly members received letters of thanks from Witney Talking News and Witney Pride for the respective grant and subsidised letting awarded to their organisations.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, £500 be approved for Clean Slate and,
3. That, £310 be approved for The Rotary Club of Witney and,
4. That, a subsidised let be granted to Witney Photo Group, valued at £340 and,
5. 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,
6. That, the correspondence from Witney Talking News and Witney Pride be noted.

F166 **YOUTH SERVICES GRANT MONITORING 2022-23**

The Committee received the report and verbal update from the Deputy Town Clerk regarding the monitoring of the large youth services grants awarded in 2022.

The Deputy Town Clerk explained that as part of the internal audit reporting, that recipients are asked to provide evidence that the amounts awarded are being used as requested in the organisation's applications.

Information had been received from Got2B, Home-Start and Oxfordshire Music & Arts Trust. Members requested that additional information be requested from Got2B to show more specifically where the funds are being spent in Witney. They also noted that APCAM had not provided any feedback and asked officer to request this so that it may be reviewed at the next meeting of the committee on 26 June 2023.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the reports from Got2B, Home-Start and Oxfordshire Music & Arts Trust be noted and,
3. That, additional information be requested regarding Got2B's activities to review 26 June 2023 and,
4. That, evidence is re-requested from APCAM to review 26 June 2023.

F167 **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 for the period up to 28 February 2023, along with an update on the Council's investments.

Also covered were a variety of topics including, an update of the council budget to date, disposal of the Corn Exchange old seating platform, the renewed energy contracts, VAT on sports pitch bookings, the continued membership of Oxfordshire Association of Local Council and the CCTV system covering Witney.

**Budget Update** - In response to a question raised by a member regarding the £20 spend on Bus Shelter Maintenance (4035) the RFO confirmed that most of the cost of maintenance of the bus shelters is labour, this £20 is likely to have been for materials.

**Corn Exchange Old Seating Platform** – Members were pleased with an offer from a local Witney youth group, the RFO confirmed the amount offered was £350. All members agreed with the sale, however asked that it is make clear it was sold as seen and that the council insurers are advised of the disposal of the asset.

**VAT on sports bookings** – The RFO gave a verbal update and explanation of the details in his report including an explanation of the "Outside the Scope" VAT Category. Members were in unanimous agreement that any VAT returned by HMRC should be paid back to the sports club from which it was paid.

There was a further discussion regarding the fees and charges for all the sports facilities during 2023-24, which were listed as including VAT. Members agreed to reduce charges to sports clubs by deducting the element of VAT currently charged, representing a decrease of approximately 9% compared with the 2022-23 charges. For the Council this would keep income the same as the reduction to the clubs is VAT which would have been passed on to HMRC; the subsidy to the facilities would remain the same.

**Membership of OALC** – Members were pleased to hear that it was due to being a member that the Council received information timely regarding the refund of VAT. Members all agreed to continuation of membership to ensure the Council retained the support they provide.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the report be noted and the management accounts for the Council for the period 1 April 2022 to 28 February 2023 be approved and,
2. That, the recommendations of the spending committees as detailed in the report be agreed and,

3. That, the officer recommendation to sell the Corn Exchange seating platform, which is surplus to the Council's requirements for the sum of £350 be approved and,
4. That, the Council has entered a contract with Green Energy UK for supply of gas and electricity to Council premises be noted and,
5. That, the new VAT position regarding sporting fees including football and cricket pitch hire be noted and to: (i) return any refunds obtained from HMRC for the period 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2022 to the respective clubs and (ii) reduce charges on sports bookings to clubs for 2023-24 by deducting the element of VAT currently charged, representing a decrease of approximately 9% compared with the 2022-23 charges.
6. That, the officer recommendation to remain in membership of the Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils during 2023-24 be approved and,
7. That, correspondence from West Oxfordshire District Council in relation to CCTV be noted and,
8. That, the Council's investments as detailed in the report be noted.

F168 **COUNCIL VEHICLE FLEET**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer providing details of the Councils fleet of vehicles and the upcoming purchases.

Members were pleased to hear that the delivery of the long-awaited Nissan Townstar was expected before 31 March 2023 thanks to the immediate response of officers to the notification from the supplier and that there was reference to electric vehicles in the future.

Members also expressed how important it is for the council to ensure it has a good policy for the replacement of Vehicles to ensure that they always have reliable resources.

**Resolved:**

That, the report be noted.

F169 **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.

F170 **PROPERTY & LEGAL MATTERS**

The Committee received a confidential verbal update from the Town Clerk.

She reported that the council's solicitors and agent were making progress with the lease negotiations for the sports clubs at West Witney.

It was also advised that the Council would be carrying out work to secure access to private road leading to Lakeside allotments.

**Resolved:**

That, the confidential verbal report be noted.

F171 **MAJOR STRATEGIC PROJECTS**

The Committee received a confidential verbal update from the Town Clerk.

The Leys masterplan was moving forward following the award of £650,000 to Courtside CIC. This work must be completed in the next 12 months and therefore the council would now be working quickly to relocate the works depot. Work on this would commence as soon as the Head of Estates joined the Council in early May.

Discussions had also progressed with West Witney Sports Club regarding the potential refurbishment of the clubhouse.

**Resolved:**

That, the confidential verbal update be noted.

F172 **STAFFING MATTERS**

The Committee received the minutes of the Personnel Sub Committee meeting held on 9 February 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 9 February and the verbal update from the meeting held earlier on 27 March be noted, and the recommendations contained therein approved.

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The meeting closed at: 7.26 pm

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Chair