

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

Held on Monday, 24 July 2023

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

Present:

Councillor R Crouch (Chair)

Councillors:	O Collins A Bailey J Doughty D Newcombe	G Meadows (In place of J Aitman) G Doughty (In place of L Cherry) D Enright (In place of R Smith) D Temple
Officers:	Sharon Groth Adam Clapton Mark Lewis Nigel Warner	Town Clerk Deputy Town Clerk Head of Estates & Operations Responsible Financial Officer
Others:	None.	

F394 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Aitman, R Smith, and L Cherry. Cllr G Meadows, D Enright and G Doughty attended as respective substitutes.

F395 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers at this juncture.

F396 MINUTES

The minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 19 June 2023 were received.

Minute 330 - A Member noted that as part of the discussion on whether to award funds to Witney Ringing Society towards the St Mary's Church bells, an unsuccessful proposal had been made to award £500 but this was not reflected in the minutes.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 19 June 2023 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

F397 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

F398 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS & 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.

F399 **LEYS SKATE PARK TENDER**

With the permission of the Chair, this item was brought up the agenda.

A confidential verbal update was provided to the Committee by the Head of Estates & Operations.

The Committee was advised the Council had followed the tender process and four submissions had been received for this refurbishment project. All four were within the £150,000 budget and had been scored by officers, Ley's stakeholders and Skateboard users on design and several quality aspects.

The result was one clear winner which had a wealth of experience in constructing Skate Parks. Members welcomed designs from the recommended tenderer and were pleased to hear the tender was inclusive and that a high level of added social value was included.

There were still some further items for checking by officers to ensure due diligence but subject to those being resolved satisfactorily, Members approved the winning tender.

Resolved:

1. That, the confidential verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the tender for the Skate Park refurbishment be awarded to the recommended contractor based on the design and quality assurance, subject to final checks.

Following the conclusion of this item the Committee returned to open session.

F400 **INCLUSIVITY & DIVERSITY PANEL**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning the reformation of a Council Inclusivity & Diversity Consultative Committee.

A Member from the previous Council administration advised the structure being suggested in the report was how it was previously envisaged but due to Covid-19 and other more pressing priorities, had not been established as hoped.

Members were in agreement the suggested structure would work and were pleased such an important aspect of inclusivity would be progressing.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,

2. That, the structure and governance of the Inclusivity & Diversity Consultation Committee as presented be agreed.

F401 **WITNEY HIGH STREET - FEEDBACK & CONSULTATION**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning the County Council's Witney and Market Square improvement project.

A presentation from County Council officers administering the project had taken place at the end of the previous week and this had helped focus where support was required. This was a hugely important and emotive issue which would affect Witney residents, businesses and visitors for years to come and a separate consultation could be counterproductive and confusing; ideas and suggestions would be better placed as part of the official planned process which was only just over a month away.

There was agreement however, that the Council should support the promotion of the Oxfordshire County Council's consultation sessions in all the usual ways; posters, website, flyers and on social media.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Town Council works collaboratively with Oxfordshire County Council to ensure the greatest possible promotion of its consultation, including exhibitions and stakeholder meetings.

F402 **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 advised Members there was nothing of note or concern within the documents in response to a query. Every payment over two months was included so it was effectively a statement of fact; all payments were within budget and the report showed the transparency of the Council in relation to its finances.

The Town Clerk/CEO added the Council's bank mandate was being finalised. Previously, all standing Members of this Committee had been agreed as payment signatories and contact from the Council's bankers would be taking place soon.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the verbal update from the Town Clerk be noted and,
3. That, the bank reconciliations and agreed the following schedule of payments be approved:

Cheque Numbers	In the sum of:	Account
Cheque 101216-101218, DDs and Standing Orders May 2023	£28,862.78	General CB 1

Cheques 34058 -34159, DDs, BACS and Standing Orders May 2023	£219,137.98	Imprest CB 2
Cheques 101219 – 101221, DDs and Standing Orders June 2023	£63,977.27	General CB 1
Cheques 34171-34204, DDs, BACS and Standing Orders June 2023	£142,716.12	Imprest CB 2

F403 FINANCE REPORT

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

The report provided a background to the management accounts and how they were structured at the Council. Members heard it was early in the financial year; any overspends showing would be covered by budget carry forwards from the previous year and earmarked reserves. There was also significant outlay for events during the summer.

The management accounts would look markedly different in six months' time as the way in which financial transactions through the Council's software would be changing; with a dedicated RFO this would be dealt with in house, rather than being completed by a separate accountant/bookkeeper and utilising the software in a more effective way. This would enable more timely reporting and enable reconfiguration of the Council's earmarked reserves and fixed asset accounting.

The Committee agreed to an additional financial matter which concerned additional funding towards the installation of a defibrillator at King George V Recreation Ground.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, up to £2,200 be allocated from the Community Infrastructure earmarked reserve to cover the cost of installing a defibrillator at King George V Recreation Ground and,
3. That, the management accounts for the Council, for the period 1 April – 30 June 2023 be approved.

F404 FINANCIAL MATTERS REFERRED FROM SPENDING COMMITTEES

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

Members were advised this report contained the financial implications emanating from the decisions made by the Council's spending Committees during the current meeting cycle.

As this Committee had overall responsibility for the Council's spending, recommendations needed to be ratified in line with financial regulations.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, recommendations of the spending Committees as detailed be approved.

F405 **GRANTS & SUBSIDISED LETTINGS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning annual grants to local organisations.

Cllr O Collins declared a non-pecuniary interest in the item as he was associated with both groups applying for grants in other ways.

Members were advised these grants were markedly different from the discretionary grants scheme the Council ran and separate budgets were held for organisations which contributed to civic and town council events.

The Committee agreed both applications warranted approval due to the excellent services they provided for the Council and the town.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, £660 be awarded to Witney Town Band as an annual grant and,
3. That, £2,100 be awarded to the Rotary Club of Witney to run the town's Christmas Lights Switch-on event and,
4. 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.

F406 **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.

F407 **YOUTH SERVICES**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning youth services in Witney.

Members were advised the Stronger Communities Committee had held conversations with local stakeholders and groups regarding the lack of youth services following the closure of Got2B CIC. That Committee had recommended a portion of the Council's youth services budget should be allocated towards financially supporting a weekly mental health drop-in event for young people in the Corn Exchange during the summer holidays.

A further recommendation was concerning a future detached youth work venture which had been proposed by a local organisation. To establish the proposed scheme, the Council would need to allocate a large proportion of the remaining youth services budget to this scheme resulting in no further youth service grants being awarded from this fund.

Members welcomed the mental health drop-in event and the detached youth work proposal and approved both recommendations.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, £1,200 from the youth services budget be allocated towards the APCAM mental health drop-in event and,
3. That, approximately £28,000 from the youth services budget be allocated towards a detached youth work project, subject to further clarification on the project from officers.

F408 **PROPERTY & LEGAL MATTERS**

The Committee received a confidential verbal update from the Town Clerk/C.E.O.

Property updates were provided on Heads of Terms for the Leys, Madley Park Hall lease discussions, the transfer of play areas from West Oxfordshire District Council, and Windrush Place Pavilion & pitch.

A legal update was provided concerning a claim against the Council on land in its ownership.

Resolved:

That, the confidential verbal update be noted.

F409 **MAJOR STRATEGIC PROJECTS**

The Committee received a confidential verbal update from the Town Clerk/C.E.O.

The Town Clerk advised that the relocation of the Works Depot was very much dependant on the Leys Hub project. Officers were working in the background on the feasibility and logistics for moving up to West Witney Sports Ground.

She also updated members on the refurbishment project of the West Witney Clubhouse. Following approved changes to the plans, the Sports & Social Club recently consulted its membership on the plans at its AGM, no issues had been raised.

Resolved:

That, the confidential verbal update be noted.

F410 **LEYS RECREATION GROUND MASTERPLAN AND IMPROVEMENTS**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) and an additional confidential verbal update from the Town Clerk.

The report outlined the Leys Masterplan project being undertaken by Courtside Hubs CIC and partly funded by the Town Council. Members were updated on the progress, content and financial management of the project, including discussions on VAT. The Council's financial and risk obligations were foremost in mind and reassurance was provided that due diligence was being undertaken by Officers to protect its long-term interests.

Officers would continue to work collaboratively with Courtside to achieve such a positive addition to the Leys and residents, but timeframes were tight and quick decisions may have to be made imminently.

Resolved:

That, the confidential updates from the RFO and Town Clerk be noted.

The meeting closed at: 7.03 pm

Chair