

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

Held on Monday, 25 September 2023

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

Present:

Councillor J Aitman (Chair)

Councillors:	R Crouch O Collins R Smith A Bailey	L Cherry D Newcombe G Doughty (In place of J Doughty)
Officers:	Sharon Groth Derek Mackenzie Nigel Warner	Town Clerk Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk Responsible Financial Officer
Others:	None.	

F498 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor J Doughty, Councillor G Doughty attended as a substitute.

F499 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from members or officers.

Councillor R Smith later declared an interest in Agenda Item 5 as she attended the church who proposed to run the Bright Futures youth service.

F500 MINUTES

The minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 24 July 2023 were received.

F401 – Witney High Street Engagement - Members were encouraged to ensure they submitted their own personal replies and promoted this to all that wished to contribute to the consultation.

The Chair also asked members to ensure that the Advent Fayre, 26 November 2023 was in their diary and reminded members the importance of their attendance to ensure the event could run.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 24 July 2023 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

F501 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

F502 **YOUTH SERVICES**

The Committee received a verbal update from the Town Clerk relating to the draft Service Level Agreement (SLA) that was being prepared for agreement with Bright Futures, in relation to a detached youth service

Members heard that the Town Clerk had received an email from the group raising some questions on the draft SLA on 22 September 2023, and for that reason she had not been able to circulate an agreed draft for consideration by the Committee. The church trustees had detailed the metrics in which they proposed to feedback to the Council in order to monitor its success. The Town Clerk asked members for suggestions. Measurements such as increase and decrease of attendees was clearly seen as important, however this must be measured in numbers.

A Member also raised the importance of care to be taken around the language the council used in the agreement so as not to adversely judge young people, one suggestion was that rather than refer to "Anti-Social Behaviour" it could be measured as "Contacts with the Police". Members saw the vital importance of having external measures from third parties such as the police.

Another key concern raised was that regular reports to the Council were made as part of the due diligence process. This included, asking questions such as, Which organisations or support groups would they be referring on to?, what training do they ensure is undertaken?, who are they accountable to for Safeguarding?

Resolved:

1. That, the verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the metrics discussed are considered by Officers in their discussion with the Trustees of the youth group provider.

F503 **CONCLUSION OF AUDIT FOR YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2023**

The Committee received and considered the notice of the conclusion of audit for the year ended 31 March 2023

Resolved

That, the Council notes that the Council's External Auditor – Moore – has completed the review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return for year ended 31 March 2023, and in their opinion the information is in accordance with the Proper Practices (external Audit Report and Certificate 2022/23).

F504 **SCHEME OF DELEGATION**

The Town Clerk advised she was unable to table the Scheme of Delegation document, and this would be deferred to the next meeting.

F505 **NALC MODEL FINANCIAL REGULATIONS**

The Committee received the report of the Responsible Financial Officer along with a verbal update.

The RFO explained the reasons behind the review by the National Association of Local Councils.

Members agreed to delegate to the RFO and Town Clerk to respond on behalf of the council to the consultation. The RFO reiterated that if any members had comments they would like to be raised to advise him or the Town Clerk by 20 October 2023.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the response to the consultation be delegated to the Town Clerk/C.E.O and RFO, taking into account any comments from Members made by 20 October 2023.

F506 **FINANCE REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) covering the activities of the management accounts for the period 1 April to 31 July.

Members heard that there was a delay to the August 2023 closedown, however this would be shortly completed and that should members have any questions they could contact the RFO directly. Also approaching was the one-year anniversary of the ground's maintenance contract being brought back in house and therefore the RFO was hopeful to now include details of the recharging of the ground maintenance costs into the Management Accounts.

Members also heard details regarding the Local Authorities Property Fund and Public Sector Deposit Fund, both managed by CCLA Fund Managers Ltd and Members were encouraged to look at the schemes to increase their knowledge of the funds.

All members agreed the approval of the councils' managements accounts for the period 1 April to 31 July 2023.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and
2. That, the managements accounts for the period 1 April to 31 July 2023 be approved.

F507 **FINANCIAL MATTERS REFERRED FROM SPENDING COMMITTEES**

The Committee received and considered the joint report of the Deputy Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer (RFO).

Members were advised this report contained the financial implications emanating from the recommendations 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.

F508 PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS

The Committee received the report of the Responsible Financial Officer outlining payment schedules, bank statements and bank reconciliations which were brought to the Policy, Governance & Finance committee as part of the Council’s due diligence.

The RFO advised Members that the process of adding all Members of this Committee to the bank mandate was progressing well and all paperwork would be ready for submission following the meeting.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the bank reconciliations be agreed, and the following schedule of payments be approved:

Cheque Numbers	In the sum of:	Account
DDs and Standing Orders July 2023	£4,600.67	General CB 1
Cheques 34205 -34270, DDs, BACS and Standing Orders July 2023	£171,959.44	Imprest CB 2
DDs and Standing Orders August 2023	£4,001.93	General CB 1
Cheques 34271 -34310, DDs, BACS and Standing Orders August 2023	£160,257.75	Imprest CB 2

F509 GRANTS & SUBSIDISED LETTINGS

The Committee received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning grant activity to local organisations.

Members received confirmation of subsidised lettings to Oxfordshire County Council, in support of the Witney High Street Community Engagements, and also the subsidised letting for the Friends of the Cemeteries group.

The Committee were also pleased to receive the correspondence from St Mary’s Church thanking the council for the grant toward costs of the NHS 75th Celebrations.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the subsidised lettings for OCC (£441) and Friends of the Cemeteries (£42.35) be approved and,
3. That, the correspondence from St Marys be noted.

F510 **BUDGET PARAMETERS 2024/25, CAPITAL & SPECIAL REVENUE PROJECTS 2024/25 AND BEYOND**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO), advising that budget setting would take place in the next cycle of meetings. Members were invited to consider any projects that they may wish to be funded in 2024/25.

Members received a detailed verbal update which expanded and provided examples on each of the six points in the report such as how the council had benefited in the reduction of energy prices immediately prior to the renegotiation of the contact prices.

The Committee was minded to note that many projects were committed to over the next year or two such as the Leys Masterplan, the relocation of the works depot and the West Witney Clubhouse refurbishment and therefore general and earmarked reserves would reduce significantly. The implications were that funds for additional projects would be limited during this period.

The Town Clerk encouraged members to ensure that they do not leave the submission of projects too late. It was usual for the council to be notified by West Oxfordshire District Council the projected tax base in mid-November in order to be able to finalise the budget. In terms of timetable, legally the precept must be submitted to the District Council by March 2024. The town council's calendar of meetings included a special council meeting for budget purposes on 11 December 2023 but it may be necessary to facilitate this in January 2024.

Members discussed the support that they would like to provide over the winter period to residents, they encouraged each other to be aware of the various schemes and help that existed so that they may pass that information to residents. Councillor J Aitman agreed to provide via email a list of schemes to assist members.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and verbal updates be noted and,
2. That, Councillor Aitman circulate details of support schemes for members to support their constituents.

F511 **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.

F512 **MAJOR STRATEGIC PROJECTS**

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

Members heard that a planning application had been made for the West Witney Clubhouse refurbishment. The installation of the new boiler at Burwell Hall to service the Changing Room facilities as well as the hall was due to commence on 2 October 2023.

In relation to developments at The Leys, the Town Clerk has received confirmation that the skatepark had been awarded a grant of up to £65,000 from the FCC recycle scheme. A final consultation with users was currently being planned. She also confirmed that no planning permission was required.

Conversations were continuing with Courtside CIC in relation to the Leys Masterplan and it was hoped that they would be submitting a planning application soon if the scheme was to progress on time. Members had been provided with email communications setting out the Officer concerns that current plans did not include sports changing rooms. Members agreed that Officers request the facilities be provided along with the main developments in order to future proof the site and provide the supporting infrastructure for current pitch users.

The Town Clerk advised that the Chair of Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments, the Head of Estates & Operations and her had met with the tenant of Langdale Hall. They had discussed some of the major repairs such as the replacement windows, and Officers would be looking into refreshing some historic quotes.

Resolved:

1. That, the confidential verbal report be noted and,
2. That, the formal contract offer for the skate park be made to Bencrete and,
3. That, the cost of replacement windows for the Langdale Hall is explored by the newly appointed Project Officer.

F513 **PROPERTY & LEGAL MATTERS**

The Town Clerk advised there was nothing to report.

F514 **STAFFING MATTERS**

The Committee received and considered the confidential minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee meeting held on 19 September 2023.

Resolved:

That, the confidential minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee held on 19 September 2023 be noted, and the recommendations contained therein approved.

The meeting closed at: 7.15 pm

Chair