

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

Held on Monday, 22 July 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	A Bailey J Doughty
Officers:	Sharon Groth Nigel Warner Adam Clapton Derek Mackenzie	Town Clerk Responsible Financial Officer Deputy Town Clerk Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
Others:	No members of the public. Councillor James Robertshaw	

F413 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

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

F414 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers.

F415 MINUTES

The minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 10 June 2024 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 10 June 2024 be approved as a correct record of the meetings and be signed by the Chair.

F416 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

F417 RESIDENT'S SATISFACTION SURVEY RESULTS

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning the results of the resident's annual satisfaction survey which was held at the beginning of the year.

Given the overarching remit of the Committee, the survey results covered all areas of the survey. Members expressed their disappointment at the results of the survey however sympathised with some of the residents comments such as those relating to maintenance of land not under the Town Council's ownership and highways maintenance issues. The Chair reminded Members that these should be reported via the Fix My Street website so that they receive the necessary attention and action.

The Deputy Town Clerk acknowledged comments relating to areas under the Town Councils ownership and advised that both Officers and the whole Operations Team would continue to work to improve these. A report would be presented at a future meeting to update Members on what action would be taken.

The Committee discussed ways the Town Council could engage with residents to advise what is under its remit and what is not. It was acknowledged that as the Town Council is the only local authority to engage with residents, that this led to it taking the impact of comments that related to the other levels of local government.

The Chair proposed that the comments relating to West Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council were forwarded to them to ensure that the residents efforts to complete the survey were recognised. All Members were in agreement.

It was further proposed by the Chair that residents be thanked for their participation in the survey by the Town Council and as the residents comments were anonymous some would be used to illustrate those that had been forwarded to WODC and OCC. All Members were in agreement.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, residents be thanked for their participation and,
3. That, comments relating to WODC & OCC be forwarded by Officers.

F418 PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS

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

A Member raised two question which the RFO responded to:

The Payment of £1,861.58 made on 30 May 2024 was for the repair of 4 streetlights in Unterhaching Park, off Woodford Way which had recently been signed over to the Town Council from West Oxfordshire District Council.

Secondly, the payment of £20,495.75 made on 7 May 2024 was in respect of the Town Council elections that took place on 4 May 2023. The RFO confirmed the delay in payment was due to late invoicing by West Oxfordshire District Council.

Resolved:

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

Payment reference/ Cheque Numbers	In the sum of:	Account
Cheques 101241-101243, DDs and Standing Orders April 2024	£75,449.55	General CB 1
Cheques 34678-34702; 34511 & 34555 (written out; DDs and Standing Orders April 2024	£172,009.17	Imprest CB 2
Cheques 101244-101249, DDs and Standing Orders May 2024	£112,250.22	General CB 1
Cheque 101250 – transfer to Council BPA	£500,000.00	General CB1
Cheques 34705-34751, DDs and Standing Orders May 2024 (cheques 34703 & 34704 void)	£161,343.14	Imprest CB 2

F419 FINANCE REPORT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) detailing income and expenditure for budgets which were the responsibility of the Committee.

Members thanked the RFO for such a comprehensive report and were pleased to see the detailed information in respect of the new energy contract and were reassured to hear that energy forecasts were significantly within budget.

The Committee heard that investment returns were also meeting budget projections however members asked that research into the potential use of more ethical investments continues. It was understood by Members who were also Councillors at West Oxfordshire District Council that performance returns were comparable to those that were being received on its current investments.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the RFO continues to investigate and evaluate ethical investments.

F420 **FINANCIAL MATTERS REFERRED FROM SPENDING COMMITTEES**

The Committee received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk (DTC) outlining the financial implications pertaining to recommendations of the Council's spending Committees.

A Member raised the non-inclusion of the recommendation made at the Stronger Communities Committee on 15 July regarding the establishment of a separate budget line to account for annual Youth Services Grants. The DTC advised that this would be included in budget setting for 2025/26.

H375 – Members received the additional quotes for the replacement coffee machine at the Corn Exchange. Members agreed to continue with purchase from Option 1, UE Coffee Roasters as this supported a local business in line with its adopted procurement policy. Members were assured that Officers continually monitor pricing in order to ensure good value for money for all consumables.

H379 – The DTC advised that the Head of Estates & Operations would be attending a workshop to commence negotiation of contract terms for the EV Microhub Scheme. Initial feedback had advised that Madley Park Hall could be considered as a location.

The DTC provided a verbal update that APCAM had arranged youth mental health drop-in sessions over the summer holidays and therefore, the remaining £1,000 Youth Provision budget (4169/408) would be used to finance these with any additional funding required to come from the discretionary budget fund (4100/407).

Resolved:

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

F421 **GRANTS & SUBSIDISED LETTINGS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk along with a verbal update detailing requests for the award of grants and subsidised lettings.

Windrush School – Members agreed unanimously that the request for £1,000 for play therapy equipment should be agreed.

Dementia Active – Members agreed on the importance of the support that could be provided by the proposed sessions however, felt that more information was required in order to reach a decision. Members asked that Officers open a dialogue with Dementia Active to enquire if the sessions would be established in Witney rather than the current Freeland location, perhaps with the offer of subsidised lettings of Burwell Hall or the Corn Exchange. The Committee agreed for the funds to be ringfenced until Officers report back.

Witney Town Band – Members considered the annual grant request. In response to a Member question as to whether it was necessary for an application to be submitted, the Town Clerk/CEO confirmed that a grant application and accompanying financial information was required each year in order for the Council to fulfil its audit obligations.

Lastly, the Town Clerk/CEO tabled a request from Witney Vikings Youth Football Club which had been received the previous working day requesting a grant of £3,000 for a new on-site container to be located at Wood Green School in order facilitate two new floodlit grass pitches. Members were unable to reach a decision without any financial information as outlined in the Council's Grant Policy. Members also asked that confirmation of permission from Wood Green School to site the container on their land be provided.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the sum of £1,000 be awarded to Windrush School from budget line 4100/407 and,
3. That, Officers open a dialogue with Dementia Active and,
4. That, the sum of £660 be awarded to Witney Town Band from budget line 4112/408 and,
5. That, the award of £11,000 to Home Start Oxford be noted and,
6. That, financial information and evidence of permission to site a container be requested from Witney Vikings Youth Football Club and,
7. That, the correspondence from Oxfordshire Mind, Bridwell Gardens, Be Free Carers, 1st Witney Ranger Girl Guides, Lowland Resue Oxfordshire, Witney Music Festival and Witney Fairtrade Action Group be noted
8. That, all the awarded grants above be awarded under the General Power of Competence and that their recipients be asked to acknowledge the Council's financial contribution in their promotional literature.

F422 **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.

F423 **CORN EXCHANGE - 1863 CAFÉ & BAR STOCKTAKE**

The Committee received the April 2024 stocktake report for the 1863 Bar & Café along with a verbal explanation from the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) outlining the Financial Summary included in the report.

Members were pleased to hear there was no cause for concern. A Member advised that to their knowledge the % Deficit reported was well below the industry average and commended the Café Staff for this.

Resolved:

1. That, the stocktake report and verbal update be noted.

F424 **PROPERTY, LEGAL & INSURANCE MATTERS**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk/CEO concerning an update on Property & Insurance matters

Members were pleased to receive the update and no questions arose.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted.
2. That, the minutes of the Community Governance task and finish group held on 8 July be agreed and the recommendations therein be approved.

F425 **MAJOR STRATEGIC PROJECTS**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk/CEO which provided an update on The Leys redevelopment and the Destination Play projects.

Leys Hub/Courtside CIC

Members were pleased to receive an update provided by Courtside CIC and welcomed seeing the advancement of the project with groundworkers on site by the beginning of August.

Destination/Adventure Play – Windrush Place Development

The Committee discussed the proposal from Oxfordshire Playing Fields Association (OPFA) to project manage the development of the Destination Play area at Windrush Place. It was felt that as the Town Council was already managing several major projects that it would be prudent to allow OPFA to take the lead in order to deliver the project given that the Section 106 funds were in place.

Members were pleased to hear that the Town Clerk/CEO believed that OPFA would set up a steering group to allow for stakeholders to feed into the project.

Resolved:

1. That, the confidential report be noted and,
2. That, Oxfordshire Playing Fields Association be requested to project manage the Destination Play project delivery.

F426 **STAFFING MATTERS**

The Committee received the minutes of the Personnel Sub Committee meeting held on 9 July 2024.

Resolved:

That, the confidential minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee meeting held on 9 July 2024, and the recommendations contained therein be approved.

The meeting closed at: 7.10 pm

Chair