

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

Held on Monday, 30 September 2024

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

Present:

Councillor R Crouch (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)

Councillors:	O Collins R Smith A Bailey	J Doughty G Meadows (In place of J Aitman)
Officers:	Sharon Groth Adam Clapton Derek Mackenzie Nigel Warner Mark Lewis Adam Cook Angus Whitburn	Town Clerk Deputy Town Clerk Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk Responsible Financial Officer Head of Estates & Operations Project Officer Operations Manager
Others:	No members of the public.	

F529 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Cllr J Aitman, for whom Cllr G Meadows attended as substitute.

F530 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers.

F531 MINUTES

The minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 22 July 2024 were received.

F425 Major Strategic Projects – In response to a Member, the Town Clerk advised that third-party project management of the Destination Play project would be progressed soon.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 22 July 2024 be approved as a correct record of the meetings and be signed by the Chair.

F532 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

F533 **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.

F534 **WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL CEMETERY REGULATION POLICY**

With the permission of the Chair, this item was moved up the agenda in order to best utilise Officers time at the meeting.

The Council received the confidential report of the Operations Manager concerning the implementation of the Cemetery Regulations following correspondence from a family to intern a set of ashes at Windrush Cemetery which was against agreed policy.

Members were provided with full background details of the issue and agreed the implications of historic discussions and outcomes on interment polices had been understood. Although the Committee was sympathetic to the family's request, they acknowledged alternative interment options had been offered as outlined in the report.

A recommendation was made to reject the request of interment outside of the cemetery regulations and to re-offer the alternative options.

A vote was then called for. The proposal was carried, with voting as follows:

In Favour	5
Against	0
Abstentions	1

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, Officers write to the family outlining the Committee's decision and,
3. That, no additional charge be made for the alternative options to be offered and,
4. That, awareness of the Cemetery Regulations be considered.

F535 **MAJOR STRATEGIC PROJECTS**

With the permission of the Chair, this item was moved up the agenda in order to best utilise Officers time at the meeting.

The Council received the confidential report of the Project Officer concerning the progress of the Council's Major Projects.

Members were disappointed to hear of the further delays to the Courtside development at The Leys having received a response to the letter sent to them on 19 September. Officers still awaited receipt of a programme of works in order to be confident of the delivery of the project.

The Committee also heard an update on the West Witney Sports and Social Club project and were pleased to hear that Officers were working to agree next steps in the assessment of an amalgamated project to include the club refurbishment and the installation of the future 3G sports pitch.

Members also received an update on the New Works Depot, all members were in agreement with the proposal for Officers to carry out a risk assessment exercise along with West Oxfordshire District Council Planning Officers. This would advance the project with the commissioning of site survey reports prior to the formal approval of the submitted planning permission.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, Officers carry a risk assessment exercise in conjunction with WODC and,
3. That, if risk is acceptable that Officers proceed with the instruction of surveys with any costs being met from the Council's General Reserve.

F536 COURTSIDE HUB UPDATE

The Committee received the update report received from Courtside CIC in relation to the delays to the Witney Leys Community Hub project.

Members were disappointed to receive the news of the delays to the project however were pleased that a start date of 7 October 2024 was proposed, and that Officers had prepared a strategy should further delay ensue.

Resolved:

That, the update be noted.

(At 6:55pm the meeting returned to Open Session at the same time the Project Officer and Operations Manager left the meeting)

F537 RESIDENTS SATISFACTION SURVEY ACTIONS

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk regarding actions resulting from the annual resident's satisfaction survey.

Members asked that the illustration that Officers had prepared showing the services provided by each tier of local government be updated to show the role in the Planning process that the Town Council provided.

The Committee also received the response from Oxfordshire Country Council in response to the Town Council's letter advising of comments related to their responsibilities. In response, members asked that details of the Fix My Street website be added to the Council's newsletter communications to raise awareness.

Members noted that a response from West Oxfordshire District Council regarding comments raised relating to matters of their responsibility was yet to be received.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the correspondence from the County Council be noted and,
3. That, details of the “Fix My Street” website be added to the Town Council Newsletter and,
4. That, the role of “Planning (Consultee Only)” be added to the diagram of Council services.

F538 AMENITY LAND SALE - POLICY REVIEW

The Committee received and considered the Requests for Sale of Amenity Land policy document.

Members were pleased to be reviewing the policy originally adopted in 2021 and to be reminded of the importance of protecting all amenity spaces under the Council’s ownership across the town.

All members were in agreement of the readoption of the policy.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Requests for Sale of Amenity Land Policy be re-adopted.

(Councillor G Meadows left the meeting at 7:00pm)

F539 PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS

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

No questions arose.

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
DDs and Standing Orders June 2024	£27,492.08	General CB 1
Cheque 101251 (internal transfer to BPA)	£250,000.00	
Cheques 34752-34803; DDs and Standing Orders June 2024	£226,774.96	Imprest CB 2
Cheques 101252-101259, DDs and Standing Orders July 2024	£106,440.60	General CB 1
Cheques 34804-34861, DDs and Standing Orders May 2024 (cheques 34804-34806 inclusive, void)	£193,593.28	Imprest CB 2

F540 **CONCLUSION OF AUDIT FOR YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2024**

The Committee received and considered the notice of the conclusion of audit for the year ended 31 March 2024.

Members noted the comments of the auditor in respect of the Inspection period being advertised as 31 days rather than 30 days.

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 2024, and in their opinion the information is in accordance with the Proper Practices (external Audit Report and Certificate 2023/24).

(Councillor G Meadows rejoined the meeting at 7:06pm)

F541 **FINANCIAL REPORT & ASSOCIATED MATTERS**

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 2024.

Members discussed the issuing of poll cards in relation to the Witney Central Ward by-election due to take place on 14 November 2024. Members agreed unanimously to have these issued by West Oxfordshire District Council in order to ensure that all residents receive notification and have the opportunity to vote.

The Committee also considered the proposed increase in subscriptions to the Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils (OALC) for 2025-26. It was proposed by Councillor O Collins, seconded by Councillor J Doughty that the Council accept the increase in order to retain the valuable services offered by OALC. All Members were in agreement.

There were also questions on the 2025-26 budget lines, in particular around growth items , Christmas lights contingency and on funds set aside for promotion which were answered by Officers.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the managements accounts for the period 1 April to 31 July 2024 be approved and,
3. That, West Oxfordshire District Council be requested to issue poll cards in relation for the Witney Central By-Election at an estimated cost of £3,250 and,
4. That, the proposed increase in subscription to the Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils (OALC) for 2025-26 be approved and,
5. That, the report on investment returns be noted and approved.

F542 **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 recommendations made by the Council's spending Committees during the current meeting

cycle. Requests for budget funding in the 2025-26 year would be considered during the next cycle.

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

Members also received verbal update with details of the proposed new agreement negotiations with Bob Wilson Funfairs along with clarity of the fees paid by West Mills Bowls Club and the responsibility for the building and fittings at West Witney Sports & Social Club.

Resolved:

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

F543 **GRANTS & SUBSIDISED LETTINGS**

The Committee received the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) concerning grant activity to local organisations.

Members received details of the £50 for fifty grants that had been received and recommended for approval . All members supported these awards. Consideration was given to a request received from Positive Measures who were a group based in Eynsham; again, all Members were happy to support the request even though it fell outside of the Witney parish area.

The Committee received a retrospective subsidised letting application from FC Mills for a charity football match, along with future subsidised hall letting request for a Seniors Christmas Party and the request of a day's hire of The Leys by Circus Ginnett to support an event raising funds for the NHS. Members were all in agreement however asked that evidence of the donation to NHS be provided for audit purposes.

Members also agreed that the requests for grant funding from Witney Vikings Youth FC should no longer be followed up by Officers, requests had been made for further information required to assess the grants request however this had not been forthcoming. A new grant request would be required should they wish to proceed in the future.

The Committee received and considered the request from Rotary Club of Witney for an increase of £400 in their grant to run the Christmas Light Switch on Event. Previously the grant was set at £2,100 however an increase to £2,500 had been made. Members were supportive of the request and asked that the additional £400 be met from the Christmas Lights Contingency fund.

The Committee were also pleased to receive correspondence by way of an event report from Oxfordshire Play Association thanking the council for the grant toward the summer playday event.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the subsidised letting requests for the Seniors Christmas Party (£123.67) and FC Mills (£65) be approved and,

3. That, the request from Circus Ginnett for a subsidized day hire at The Leys in the sum of £196.60 be approved subject to satisfactory evidence of the contribution to the NHS and,
4. That, the award of grants of £50 to Witney Fairtrade Action Group, West Oxfordshire Levellers, Witney Pride, Witney Shed and Witney Town Band from the Town Council 50th Anniversary grants fund be endorsed and,
5. That, the grant application by Positive Measures for a grant of £50 from the Town Council 50th Anniversary grants fund “£50 for Fifty” be approved and,
6. That, the grant application by the Rotary Club of Witney in the sum of £2,500 for the Christmas Lights switch-on event be approved with the additional £400 being paid from the Christmas Light Contingency fund and,
7. 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.
8. That, the correspondence from the Oxfordshire Play Association be noted and
9. That, the grant request from Witney Vikings be closed.

F544 **CORN EXCHANGE - 1863 CAFE & 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 receive report which once again showed the prudence of staff with very low levels of wastage.

Resolved:

That, the stocktake report and verbal update be noted.

The meeting closed at: 7.40 pm

Chair