

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

Held on Monday, 3 February 2025

At 6.02 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 D Newcombe
Officers:	Sharon Groth Nigel Warner Adam Clapton Derek Mackenzie Adam Cook	Town Clerk Responsible Financial Officer Deputy Town Clerk Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk Project Officer
Others:	Councillor Geoff Doughty Councillor Thomas Ashby No members of the public.	

F60 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

F61 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor O Collins declared a registrable non-pecuniary interest in respect of Agenda Item 10 as he was a non-paid Director and Interim Chair of West Oxfordshire Community Transport.

He further advised he was the chair of the Witney Community Support Service who had submitted a £50 for fifty grant being considered at the meeting.

F62 MINUTES

The minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 25 November 2024 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 25 November 2024 be approved as a correct record of the meetings and be signed by the Chair.

F63 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The Committee adjourned for this item.

The Committee received representation from a representative of Lowland Resue Oxford concerning their respective grant application to be discussed under Agenda Item 14.

The Committee reconvened.

F64 **GRANTS & SUBSIDISED LETTINGS**

The Committee considered the grant application for Lowland Rescue Oxford at this juncture so their representative could hear the debate and outcome.

Members thanked the representative for the invaluable work provided by Lowland Rescue in Witney and agreed to the grant request. The award could not be provided until the new financial year as the group had already been awarded grant funding in 2024/25.

Resolved:

1. That, £2,495 be awarded to Lowland Rescue Oxford in the new fiscal year starting on 1st April 2025 and,
2. That, this grant be awarded under the General Power of Competence and that the group be asked to acknowledge the Town Council's support in any promotional material.

*During the following agenda item Cllr A Bailey left the meeting at 6:31pm
returning at 6:34pm*

F65 **THE LEYS - SPLASH PARK RENOVATION PROCUREMENT**

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

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Project Officer concerning procurement for the Splashpark Renovation.

Members were advised a clear direction had been provided on the specification for the refurbishment from the consultation which had taken place during last summer. Following the renovation the Splashpark would be remotely operable and reduce water consumption which could extend opening times, but regrettably the budget would not extend to a grey water circulation system as previously hoped. There was a risk that an underground water storage container would need to be replaced, but it was confirmed the cost of this would be covered by a contingency fund.

During procurement research it was established there were only a small number of companies in the UK able to conduct the specialist work and only two expressed interest after details of the project were published on the national contracts' finder website.

Members heard Contractor B had been discounted due to their financial standing when undertaking procurement checks which could have put the project and Council at undue financial risk. Contractor A passed the checks and were included in a procurement framework manged by Kent County Council. Due diligence had been conducted to enable them to be in the framework, but further discussion would be required to ensure best value of funds. Following

enquiries, Officers established that it was possible the refurbished splash park could be delivered later in the summer of 2025. A completion date would be included in the agreed contract along with financial penalties for late delivery.

If the project was procured via the framework route, it would still be secured under the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and although this meant deviating from the Town Council's financial regulations, it was noted residents thought highly of the Splashpark and there would be further frustration if the project was delayed beyond the autumn, due to procurement issues and focus on other projects.

It was proposed by Cllr R Smith, seconded by Cllr O Collins that the Committee proceed with the report recommendations. The Chair read each in full so that Members clearly understood.

A Vote was then called for in respect of the recommendations with Members being unanimous in agreement with Recommendation 2.

In respect of Recommendations 1 & 3 the result of both the votes were:

In Favour	6
Against	0
Abstentions	1

Resolved:

1. That, the confidential report be noted.
2. That, contractor B is not invited to tender due to their financial standing posing undue risk to the completion of the contract. That it be noted that this procurement has been undertaken in accordance with the Public Procurement Regulations 2015. However, having due regard to the comments above on risk, and for the avoidance of doubt, the Council waives Financial Regulations to enable a price to be negotiated without competition as permitted by FR 11(d) and also to permit the use the Kent County Council Framework. The reason for this course of action is that the Council has complied with the Public Contract Regulations 2015, which permits the use of framework agreements and that due to the nature of the works and the Council's desire to open the facility in May 2025 it has only identified one contractor, Contractor A, suitable and able to undertake the works.
3. That, it be noted that the Public Contract Regulations 2015 allow for framework agreements to be used, and that the due diligence conducted by Kent County Council concerning their Procurement Framework which satisfies the obligations imposed on Local Authorities by the Public Contract Regulations 2015. Officers are therefore requested to investigate this procurement route with regard to future procurement and consider how this is detailed in the revised Financial Regulations.
4. That, the quotation from Ustigate Waterplay in the sum of £172,499.11 be approved and funded from the earmarked reserve in relation to the Splashpark (£172,500) , and that authority be delegated to the Town Clerk/CEO to enter into a contract of works in relation to this matter.

It was further noted that a sum of up to £30,518 may be required for replacement of the water tank system. Whether this would be required, and the cost, would depend on what was found when work begins but if additional funding were to be required for this matter, this would be funded by virement from the Capital Play Equipment budget , which had a current year budget of £75,000 of which spend was £0.

The Project Officer left the meeting at 6:41pm.

F66 **ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) along with an updated Investment Strategy.

There was a question on the numbering of the points as well as requests for minor amendments to the Investment Objectives section on page 2 to ensure it read clearly.

Resolved:

1. That the Annual Investment Strategy 2024/25 is formally approved by the Committee, and subsequently Full Council on 17 February 2025 subject to the above amendments.
2. That this report is approved and:
 - (i) That the report on annual investment activity for the previous financial year (in this case, 2024-25) is presented at the meeting of this Committee in June 2025 and,
 - (ii) That the Investment Strategy for 2025-26 is considered in the July 2025 cycle of meetings.

F67 **CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk along with a set of Customer Service Standards to be adopted by the Council.

Members were advised the Standards had been recommended for approval by the Council's Personnel Sub-Committee, were broadly in line with other local authorities and would not be difficult to achieve given already excellent response rates for which the administration team should be commended. An organisation of the Council's size should have published standards of expectation for residents, and this was a requirement of the NALC Silver Local Council Award Scheme status it was aspiring to.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Customer Service Standards, as presented, be adopted by Witney Town Council and,
3. That, congratulatory feedback be provided to the administration team for excellent enquiry response times.

F68 **THIRD PARTY EVENTS - POLICY REVIEW**

The Committee considered an addition to the Council's Third-Party Events Policy concerning disabled parking on its land.

A recommendation had been provided by the Stronger Communities Committee that disabled parking would be considered at the discretion of Officers on receipt of an acceptable risk assessment and traffic movement plan.

Resolved:

That, the addition on the provision and management of disabled parking at third party events be added to the policy.

F69 PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS

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

Resolved:

1. 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 August 2024 , Cheques 101261-101262 Transfer to BPA via cheque 101260	£79,510.21 £250,000.00	General CB 1
Cheques 100059(manual), 34862-34898; DDs and Standing Orders August 2024	£158,487.12	Imprest CB 2
Cheques 101263-101265, DDs and Standing Orders September 2024	£63,155.52	General CB 1
Cheques 34899- 34963, DDs and Standing Orders September 2024	£186,087.25	Imprest CB 2

F70 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

The Committee received and considered the report of the Senior Administrative Officer/Committee Clerk concerning the Annual Town Meeting format which would be held on Wednesday 19th March 2025.

Members were provided with outline proposals for the meeting which were broadly along the same format as before. The main change would be the introduction of an annual report produced by officers, rather than individual Committee reports; this would mean Committee Chairs would not be required to present their reports individually.

The other suggestions were that officers consider how to engage and include under 18's in the conversation, participation of community groups and how the meeting could be made more interactive with the use of technology.

It was agreed there should be youth participation and possibly a separate Youth Annual Town Meeting in the future, short videos could be provided by groups & grant awardees, and that consideration be given to temporary residents who would not be on the electoral roll.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the layout and format for the meeting be agreed as presented in the report and,
3. That, Café 1863 should be opened and,
4. That, the Youth Council be invited to attend the meeting and consideration be given to how other under-18's can participate and,
5. That, short videos from community groups/grant awardees be requested and,
6. That, consideration be given to how to involve temporary Witney residents in the meeting.

F71 **COMMITTEE CALENDAR 2025-26**

The Committee received the draft calendar of Meetings for the 2025/26 council year.

The Senior Administrative Assistant/Committee Clerk highlighted a change which formalised a January meeting in 2026 to sign off the budget and Town Council precept.

Resolved:

That, the calendar of meetings for 2025/26 be recommended for approval.

*During the following agenda item Cllr O Collins left the meeting at 7:08pm
returning at 7:11pm*

F72 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT DEVOLUTION AND THE ENGLISH DEVOLUTION WHITE PAPER**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk & C.E.O concerning recently announced plans for devolution in Council's across England.

Members were advised the terms of devolution had not yet been confirmed but the Council should be proactive, considering aspirations, funding needs ahead of any negotiations and permitting an officer resource to the task. The National Association of Local Councils would be supportive and instrumental in leading the sector.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

F73 **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 receives the management accounts and investment returns for the Council. The accounts showed little change since the budget-setting process and the investment returns had held up well in the current financial climate.

There was further discussion concerning Witney Music Festival accounts and governance following the previous meeting. It was agreed a meeting with WMF was required to discuss this further.

Finally, the Committee discussed a request to allow discounted carer tickets to an event in the Corn Exchange in March. Members were favourable to the request and agreed a policy should be created and presented to a future meeting of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the management accounts of the Committee's services to 30 November 2024 be approved and,
3. That, representatives from Witney Music Festival be invited to meet with officers and,
4. That, a discount for carers tickets at the West End Magic show in the Corn Exchange be approved and,
5. That, a policy on discounted carer tickets be brought to the next meeting of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee.

F74 FINANCIAL MATTERS REFERRED FROM SPENDING COMMITTEES

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

Members noted the financial implications from decisions taken by the Council's standing Committees during the last meetings cycle.

Resolved:

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

F75 GRANTS & SUBSIDISED LETTINGS

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

Members were updated on the progress of the 50th Anniversary Grants fund and ratified the recommendations of the Chair of the Committee on the next set of awards. Officers confirmed an application form had been received and the criteria had been met for all.

Having discussed the application for Lowland Rescue earlier in the meeting, Members considered the grant application from Witney Dramatic Society and the value of the requested amount to the wider community. There was concern that lighting depreciated quickly and often needed replacing and it was a substantial amount as part of a larger upgrade over several years. It was agreed the Chair and officers should request to meet with the group to learn more and also discuss the potential use of the Corn Exchange which had upgraded facilities.

With regard to subsidised letting requests, the Committee were favourable for providing free use of the Corn Exchange for Witney Allotment Association, Witney Photo Group, an annual bus users meeting under the Witney Traffic Advisory Committee and noted the agreement for a subsidised film screening by the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee.

Finally, the Committee noted thanks from Witney & West Oxfordshire Foodbank and Witney Food Revolution regarding financial support at the end of 2024.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, '£50 for Fifty' grants be awarded to Friends of Witney Community Support Service, Springfield School, Witney Grandparent & Toddler Group, Witney Youth Council, and 2120 Squadron RAF Air Cadets and,
3. That, subsidised lettings for Witney Allotment Association and for a film screening in the Corn Exchange be noted and,
4. That, subsidised lettings for Witney Photo Group for the sum of £399 and for an annual bus users meeting be agreed and,
5. That, the correspondence from Witney & West Oxfordshire Foodbank and Witney Food Revolution be noted and,
6. That, the above grants be provided under the General Power of Competence and recipients be asked to acknowledge the Town Council in any promotional material.

F76 **ANNUAL GRANTS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning the release of annual grants to local organisations where funds had been agreed during the budget-setting process.

Members noted the value and services provided by all groups listed in the report and were happy to support the release of budgeted funds for the benefit of Witney residents subject to any necessary paperwork being obtained.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the release of an award of £2,000 to Volunteer Link be approved and,
3. That, the release of grants as presented to Witney & District Museum, Witney & District Twinning Association, and Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire be approved and released subject to a written request and supporting documents where required and,
4. That, £1,000 be released to Oxfordshire Play Association towards a Play Day on town council land in August 2025 and,
5. That, £2,400 be released by way of a grant to Witney Carnival Committee towards the Witney Carnival in July 2025 and,
6. That, with the exception of Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire, the above grants be awarded under the General Power of Competence and,
7. That, the grant to Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire be awarded under Section 142 of the Local Government Act 1972 and,
8. That, all grant awarded groups be asked to acknowledge the Town Council's support in any promotional material.

The Responsible Financial Officer left the meeting at 7:55pm

F77 **SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 48(A)**

Resolved

That Standing Order 48(a) be suspended in order to allow the meeting to continue as it had now lasted for two hours.

F78 **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.

F79 **STRATEGIC PROPERTY, LEGAL & INSURANCE MATTERS**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk/C.E.O.

Members received updates concerning the Witney Allotment Association, Windrush Place Pavilion & sports pitches, notification of a freedom of information request and a potential legal matter concerning an insurance claim.

With regard to the allotments, flooding at the Lakeside site was raised as a problem. It had previously been explored by officers and a possible long-term solution had been discounted as cost prohibitive. Due to further extensive flooding of the allotments, officers would re-visit the issue.

Resolved:

1. That, the confidential report be noted and,
2. That, officers re-visit the issue of flooding at Lakeside allotments.

F80 **STAFFING MATTERS**

The Committee received the minutes of the Personnel Sub Committee meeting held on 21 January 2025.

Resolved:

That, the confidential minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee meeting held on 21 January 2025, and the recommendations contained therein be approved.

The meeting closed at: 8.09 pm

Chair