

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

Held on Monday, 31 March 2025

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

Present:

Councillor J Aitman (Chair)

Councillors:	R Crouch	J Doughty
	O Collins	D Newcombe
	R Smith	
Officers:	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Nigel Warner	Responsible Financial Officer
Others:	None	

F180 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor A Bailey.

F181 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or officers.

F182 MINUTES

The minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 3 February 2025 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 3 February 2025 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

F183 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

F184 NALC MODEL FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

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

Following the 2024 review by the National Association of Local Councils which had led to comprehensive amendments, the Council received a draft of the Council's financial regulations which had been updated to reflect its activities. The RFO welcomed comments prior to consideration of the final version at a future meeting of the Committee on 9th June 2025.

Resolved

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the Members provide any comments on the draft financial regulations to the RFO prior to adoption at the meeting on 9th June 2025.

F185 CEMETERY REGULATIONS

The Committee received and considered the revised Cemetery Regulations.

Further to the approval of the Halls, Cemeteries and Allotments Committee on 17 March 2025, Members welcomed the review which would ensure compliance with legislation and offer clear guidance for residents and funeral directors on what was permissible.

The Committee heard that they would be communicated to all user of the cemeteries, funeral directors and memorial masons with immediate effect.

Resolved:

That, the revised cemetery regulations be adopted and applied with immediate effect.

F186 RECORDING OF MEETINGS POLICY REVIEW

The Committee received an updated Protocol for Recording of Public meetings which was overdue for review.

Members heard that although the legislation had not changed, the practice of individuals being able to record a meeting had and therefore the updated protocol was welcomed and unanimously agreed for adoption.

Resolved:

That, the updated Protocol for Recording at Public Meetings be adopted by Witney Town Council.

F187 PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS

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

In response to a Member's question, the RFO confirmed that the number of cheques now being issued had decreased as Officers phased in the use of electronic transfers and would continue to do so. This provided both a financial saving from reduced postage and also in Officers processing time.

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, EPs (electronic payment) and Standing Orders December 2024	£43,716.91	General CB 1
Cheques 35043-35096; DDs, BACs and Standing Orders December 2024	£164,303.00	Imprest CB 2
Cheques 101272-101276, DDs, EPs and Standing Orders January 2025	£199,871.50	General CB 1
Cheques 35096-35115, various cancelled cheques, DDs and Standing Orders January 2025	£21,462.62	Imprest CB 2

F188 INTERNAL AUDIT

The Committee received and considered the interim update report of the Internal Auditor, Auditing Solutions for 2024/25 along with the January 2025 stocktake for liquor conducted by the Council's independent stock checker.

Members welcomed the report which provided reassurance as it highlighted no areas of concern.

It was also acknowledged by Members that the January 2025 stocktake showed improvements to the running costs for the Corn Exchange.

The Committee then considered the appointment of Auditing Solutions for an additional year. The RFO reiterated the recommendation in his report that a full review of providers would be carried out in March 2026 ahead of the 2026/27 audit appointment.

Resolved:

1. That, the Interim Audit Report 2024/25 from the Council's internal auditors be noted and,
2. That, the external stocktake report for January 2025 be noted and,
3. That, the appointment of Internal Auditor report be noted and,
4. That, Auditing Solutions are appointed as the Councils Internal Auditor for 2025-26 and,
5. That the appointment of Internal Auditor for 2026-27 be reviewed in March 2026 and,
6. That the Council review its internal audit service provision in 2026 ahead of the procurement of the internal audit service for 2027-28.

F189 EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERNAL CONTROL: CORPORATE & FINANCIAL RISK ASSESSMENT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer and provided a verbal update to explain the need for a robust corporate risk assessment to be in place.

The RFO answered questions from a Member concerning the assessment of the risks included in the documents as well as the structuring of action plans to deal with issues that arose. He advised that the responsibility sat with the RFO who in conjunction with Line Managers, worked to ensure that identified issues were actioned swiftly.

An error was noted in the Banking and Investments sheet, point 3 should show as a rating of 2 rather than 4.

Resolved:

1. That the report be noted and,
- 2.

That, the Risk Management Policy & Corporate Risk Assessment for the financial year 2024-25 be endorsed and signed by the Chair

F190 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 heard that although the accounts presented were to the 31 January, that with it being the last day of the financial year, the RFO did not expect any major changes to the revised 2024/25 budget projections.

The RFO provided a verbal update on the Council's insurance premium which had been renewed in the last year of a fixed agreement. In particular, officers had undertaken a review of motor insurance policy prices to ensure due diligence with regard to best value.

A Member raised a question as to the columns used in the reports that were provided, the RFO explained that after the budget setting period in December of each year the report columns did change however, he would review and consider how they are provided in the future.

The Committee were pleased to see good returns of interest, however it was explained that this was partly due to the capital sums for projects had been held longer than projected.

Members considered the continued membership of the Co-Operative Councils Innovation Network (CCIN); it was felt that it was a small membership fee for the potential opportunity of use for future grant funding. It was unanimously agreed that membership should continue for 2025/26.

The report also provided an update on the Witney Music Festival and their governance which had been discussed at previous meetings,

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the management accounts of the Committee's services to 31 January 2025 be approved and,
3. That, the investments report to the period of 28 February 2025 be approved and,
4. That, the Council continue it's membership of CCIN for a further year.

F191 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.

F192 GRANTS & SUBSIDISED LETTINGS

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

Members received a verbal update from the Deputy Town Clerk following the meeting held with Witney Dramatic Society (WDS) regarding their request for grant funding for replacement lighting. Both the District Councils West Hive scheme and Witney Town Charity were suggested as additional sources of funding that WDS may wish to explore. The Committee unanimously agreed a grant of £1,500 to kickstart their fundraising with a potential additional £500 if required to help them meet their goal. WDS should also be invited to apply for a subsidised let of the Corn Exchange for their 80th anniversary performance.

The Committee then discussed the ongoing issue of toilet provision at West Witney Sports & Social Club (WWSCC) for Witney Park Run, who were the only sport club user who have expressed an issue with the lack of provision. Members were all in an agreement with the award of a grant to fund the opening of the club for six months to support the free community event each week.

Subsidised lettings of The Leys Recreation ground were discussed and agreed by all Members for Witney Carnival, Witney Pride, Witney Music Festival; it was additionally agreed that as the

budget line would be exhausted that £320 be vired from the discretionary grant budget underspend for 2024/25.

It was unanimously agreed by Members to support the recommendation of the Stronger Communities Committee that of the £1,300 underspend in the £50 for fifty grant scheme £1,000 be vired to support the WeGame sessions provided by APCAM and for the remaining £300 to be vired to support the expanding programme of VE Day 80th Anniversary Celebrations.

Members discussed the use of the remaining discretionary grants budget and again supported the recommendation of the Stronger Communities Committee to provide £2,600 to APCAM to provide mental health drop-in session in the Corn Exchange from the discretionary grants underspend for 2024/25.

The Committee reviewed the request from Witney Town Band for a grant to support its annual activities and a potential subsidised let later in the year; it was agreed that the band was an asset to the town and that their requests should be supported.

The request from Witney Youth Council to host a cultural event in the Corn Exchange was also supported and the Committee was unanimous in support of the subsidised use of the hall so this can take place.

Lastly, the Town Clerk/CEO provided a verbal update confirming the award to the Council of £5,000 from Cllr Enright's (OCC) Councillor priority funding to be used towards interpretation panels in the towns playgrounds and also to provide a bleed kit.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and verbal updates be noted and,
2. That, Witney Dramatic Society be invited to apply for a subsidised let of the Corn Exchange for their anniversary performance and,
3. That, a grant of £1,500 be awarded to Witney Dramatic Society with an additional £500 held in reserve and,
4. That, a grant of £1,040 be made available for the use of toilets at West Witney by Witney Parkrun and,
5. That, subsidised lettings of The Leys for Witney Pride (£730), Witney Carnival (£1,810) and Witney Music Festival (£3,280) be agreed and,
6. That, the additional £320 to fund the Leys recreation ground subsidised letting requests be vired from the discretionary grants budget (4100/407) and,
7. That, subsidised lettings of the Corn Exchange for Witney Town Band (£205) and Witney Youth Council (£205) be agreed and,
8. That, the annual grant of £660 be agreed for Witney Town Band and,
9. That, £1,000 of the underspend from the £50 for fifty grant scheme be utilised to provide the APCAM WeGame sessions in the 2025/26 financial year and,
10. That, £2,600 be provided from the discretionary grants budget to APCAM for the provision of drop-in sessions in the 2025/26 financial year and,
11. That, the remaining £300 from the £50 for fifty grant scheme be allocated to the VE Day 80th Anniversary celebrations and,
12. 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.

F193 WEST WITNEY PROJECT FUNDING

The Committee received the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) along with a verbal explanation in relation to the financial funding and project timetable of the West Witney Sports & Social Club redevelopment and new Works Depot.

Members heard the reasoning for the loan was to facilitate the works and how it would be structured to ensure that the burden is borne by future users of the facilities as well as current users as this was the prudent and proper way for the Council to act.

The Committee welcomed the period of consultation which was timetabled to take place in May and for its design and delivery to be delegated to the Town Clerk/CEO. They also welcomed that the outline consideration of the loan application be discussed at the 9th June meeting of the Committee ahead of its submission. Members were unanimous in agreement of both these decisions and asked officers to consider communications as early as possible.

In response to a Members question regarding rising costs and if the cost should exceed the projections made. The RFO confirmed that although Value Engineering could be utilised it would be possible for the Council to discuss an increase to the loan amount, though this would hopefully not be necessary as Officers would strive to work to remain within the budget.

The RFO further confirmed that despite rising interest rates the projected interest payments that were budgeted for in the setting of the 2025/26 budget were still within the expected range.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the West Witney project timetable be approved and,
3. That, the design and delivery of the consultation be delegated to the Town Clerk/CEO.

F194 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.

F195 PROPERTY, LEGAL & INSURANCE MATTERS

The Committee received the confidential report of the Town Clerk/CEO which included updates on St Marys' Church Carillion, lease agreement with Bob Wilson Funfairs and progress of the Windrush Place Pavillion.

Members received and considered the report of the Diocese clock advisor and in respect of the St Marys' Church Carillion Members were in in favour of preserving the heritage of the church and its clock assets. The Town Clerk/CEO advised that funds had been set allocated in the

2025/26 budget to be used for any necessary repairs that were identified in the report of the clock custodians.

The Committee received and considered the recommendation of the Stronger Communities Committee in respect of a lease Agreement with Bob Wilson Funfairs. Members were unanimous in support of the current proposal.

Members heard from the Town Clerk/CEO on the progression of the Pavillion and it was agreed by Members that a Pavillion Task & Finish group be established so that this could be focused on bringing about the best resolution for the Council and community. It was agreed unanimously that the group be made up of Cllrs Crouch, Smith and Newcombe and that the Town Clerk/CEO circulate details collated so far to the group.

Lastly, the Deputy Town Clerk advised the Committee of a potential copyright issue which was being explored further by Officers, it was agreed that Officers speak with the National Association of Local Councils to gain their views.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and verbal update noted and,
2. That, a "Pavilion Task & Finish Group" be established and the membership be made up of Cllrs, Crouch, Smith & Newcombe and,
3. That, the recommendation of the Stronger Communities Committee concerning the commercial agreement with Bob Wilson Funfairs be approved and,
4. That, repairs to the St. Mary's Church clock & carillon be carried out in accordance with the Oxford Diocesan report and,
5. That, Officers contact NALC in relation to the copyright issue.

F196 STAFFING MATTERS

The Committee received the minutes of the Personnel Sub Committee meeting held on 13 February and 20 March 2025.

Resolved:

That, the confidential minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee meeting held on 13 February and 20 March 2025, and the recommendations contained therein be approved.

The meeting closed at: 7.44 pm

Chair