

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

Held on Monday, 13 July 2020

At 6.00 pm in the VIRTUAL MEETING VIA ZOOM - Virtual Meeting

Present:

Councillor L Ashbourne (Chair)

Councillors:	J Aitman	V Gwatkin
	O Collins	M Jones
	H Eaglestone	R Smith
Officers:	Nicky Cayley	Democratic Services Officer
	Adam Clapton	Office Manager
	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
Others:	None.	

F189 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for his absence was received from Cllr Harvey.

F190 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no interests declared at this point in the meeting.

F191 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no members of the public present for this item.

F192 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR

RESOLVED: that Cllr Smith be elected Vice Chair for the ensuing municipal year.

F193 MINUTES

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2020.

RESOLVED: to confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2020 as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

There were no matters arising.

F194 **COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE, VISION AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR**

The Committee received and considered draft terms of reference for the committee.

RESOLVED: that the terms of reference as presented be confirmed and adopted for the ensuing municipal year.

F195 **PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Office Manager as circulated with the agenda, along with the payment schedules, bank reconciliations and bank statements for the period 1 January 2020 to 31 May 2020.

RESOLVED:

1. that the report be noted;
2. that the bank reconciliations and bank statements be noted;
3. that the following schedules of payments be approved:

Cheque No's	In the sum of:	Account
Cheques 101121-101122, DDRs and Standing Orders (Jan 2020)	£59,304.82	General Cashbook 1
Cheques 32522-32551 and DDs (Jan 2020)	£71,449.76	Imprest Cashbook 2
Cheques 101123-101129, DDRs and Standing Orders (Feb 2020)	£1,111,039.80	General Cashbook 1
Cheques 32552-32604 and DDs (Feb 2020)	£83,881.14	Imprest Cashbook 2
Cheques 101130-101132, DDRs (March 2020)	£59,375.44	General Cashbook 1
Cheques 32605-32646 and DDs (Mar 2020)	£95,546.40	Imprest Cashbook 2
Cheques 101133-101135, DDRs and Standing Orders (Apr 2020)	£66,007.24	General Cashbook 1
Cheque 32647 and DDs (Apr 2020)	£70,100.02	Imprest Cashbook 2
Cheques 101136-101137, DDRs and Standing Orders (May 2020)	£29,033.33	General Cashbook 1
Cheques 32648-32700 and DDs (May 2020)	£111,382.53	Imprest Cashbook 2

F196 **FINANCIAL REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk, highlighting the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic had had on the Council's income. The Town Clerk advised that she would be writing to the District Council's Cabinet Member for Finance as NALC had advised that government funding had been given to District Councils to distribute to town and parish councils to alleviate the effect of COVID-19 on income and the additional expenditure it was burdened with. The Town Clerk would be seeking some sort of recompense to offset some of the Council's lost income and additional expenditure. She also advised that the grant of free use of the Corn Exchange to Witney Fridge during lockdown would be accounted for.

Member also discussed grant funding to West Oxfordshire Community Transport and the requirement to renew the Council's utilities contracts.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted and:-

1. that the grant funding for West Oxfordshire Community Transport continues to be paid at the current rate of £1,500 per month (£18,000 per annum) for the remainder of the financial year and that it is raised to the higher amount of £21,000 from April 2021. This rate would continue for three years but the Council would retain the right to review this after two years.
2. that in relation to the utilities contract, the Compliance and Environment Officer be charged with finding the most competitive green energy tariff available with the Council's existing utility provider, with the ultimate decision delegated to the Town Clerk in consultation with the appropriate Members if needed.

F197 **BANKING ARRANGEMENTS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk as circulated with the agenda which highlighted the fact that the bank mandates needed updating.

RECOMMENDED: that the report be noted and:-

1. that the Members of the Policy, Governance and Finance Committee be authorised signatories on Barclays Bank mandates and if necessary two be named to be able to act on behalf of the Council – in the absence of the Town Clerk, should the need arise;

[the current Members of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee being: Cllrs Luci Ashbourne (Chair & Leader of the Council), Ruth Smith, Vicky Gwatkin, Owen Collins, Harry Eaglestone, Mel Jones, Joy Aitiman and David Harvey]

2. that Members of the Policy, Governance and Finance Committee be authorised signatories on the CCLA Accounts and that in particular two are named to act on behalf of the Council – in the absence of the Town Clerk, should the need arise;
3. that the named signatories are Cllrs Gwatkin, Aitiman and Harvey;
4. that the Town Clerk is also listed on the bank mandate for the Barclays Bank General and Business Premium Account as being able to deal with transfers between accounts as well as setting up direct debits;

5. that the Office Manager is set-up to be able to cash cheques up to £500 at the local Barclays Bank branch to replenish the Council's petty cash account;
6. the implementation of online banking with the Council's current banking provider, Barclays Bank PLC, be agreed subject to the amendments to the Council's Financial Regulations, which will be presented to the next meeting of this Committee.

F198 **INTERNAL AUDIT - FINAL REPORT FOR 2019/20**

The Committee received and considered the final internal audit report for 2019/20. The Town Clerk pointed out that it was the role of the Internal Auditor to sign page 3 of the Annual Governance & Accountability Return covered at the next agenda item

The Committee congratulated the Town Clerk and Office Manager on the content of the Internal Audit report.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

F199 **ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN (AGAR) 2019/20**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk along with the Annual Governance and Accountability Return for 2019/20.

She explained that it was the role of the Committee to carry out its due diligence and go through the Annual Governance Statement to confirm the correct procedures were in place with the Council's sound financial management. She pointed out that she had been unable to present the Annual Corporate Risk Assessment to Council because she'd been off sick for a period of time at the beginning of the year and then COVID-19 had resulted in the last Policy, Governance and Finance meeting being postponed. Due to these extenuating circumstances regrettably, she advised the Members that no formal assessment could be presented and they would need to answer question 5 of the governance statement with ticking NO. She explained the potential consequences of this but reassured members that the fact she was the only Officer able to run this report would be addressed via the organisational review being undertaken later in the year.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted and:

1. that the Annual Governance Statement at Section 1 of the Annual Return for the year ended 31 March 2020 where questions 1 to 9 were answered yes, (with the exception of question 5 – which will be no) be approved;
2. that in regard to question 5 – where, due to extenuating circumstances of the Town Clerk/RFO being off for a period of sickness absence culminating with the COVID-19 pandemic – the following explanation be provided to the external auditor along with the assurance that the Council is undertaking an organisational review to address capacity issues and will ensure that support is given to the Town Clerk to illuminate the fact only one member of staff is able to assess the corporate/financial risks of the Council;
3. that the Statement of Accounts at Section 2 of the Annual Return for the year ended 31 March 2020 be approved, and presented to full Council for formal adoption on 27 July 2020;

4. that the unaudited Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2020 be noted.

F200 **DIGITAL RESILIENCE**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Office Manager. His report covered how the offices had been able to operate during lockdown although it would have been more advantageous and efficient if there was more mobile phones and laptops as some employees had used their own equipment. He also highlighted the lack of digitalisation of burial records and has sought a quote which could link into the Council's mapping software.

RECOMMENDED: that the report be noted and:

1. that the quote for digitalised mapping of the Cemeteries from Pear Technologies be accepted;
2. that sales invoices be issued to customers electronically unless requested otherwise;
3. that the procurement of proportionate equipment (such as laptops/works mobile phones) be purchased for the purpose of continuing Council services while homeworking, be delegated to the Town Clerk and Office Manager.

F201 **GRANTS AND SUBSIDISED LETTINGS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Democratic Services Officer along with seven grant applications. It was noted that Witney Buttercross Scouts had applied for a substantial grant, not realising that the maximum grant from the Council was £500. Members discussed this application as the project to refurbish the premises was substantial and the group had applied for other funding. It was agreed that £500 should be pledged and that it could be drawn down at a later date when the project went ahead.

Members were also not comfortable in granting the Rotary Club £500 for its planned Dragons Den event without having a clear idea on how it would be spent. It was decided that it would be better to grant free use of the Corn Exchange instead.

It was noted that some of these planned events may not go ahead because of COVID-19 therefore funds should only be forwarded once the future of the events was known.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that the report be noted;
2. that the following grants be made under the General Power of Competence:

Rotary Club	£162.50 subsidised letting	To cover the cost of the hire of the Corn Exchange.
Witney Buttercross Scouts	£500.00 pledged	To be drawn down by the group when work commences on the project.
Witney Wonderland	£485.00	To cover the hire of the Corn Exchange.

Witney Town Band	£500.00	Annual grant
Witney Fair Trade Action Group	£85.00	To cover the hire of the Corn Exchange for a fair-trade talk
Witney Music Society	£50.00	Towards artists fees
Mayor of Witney	£325.00	Towards 2 hires of the Corn Exchange for fundraising events.

F202 MARKING COMMUNITY & NATIONAL CAMPAIGNS VIA LIGHTING-UP PUBLIC BUILDINGS

The Committee received and considered the report of the Office Manager as circulated with the agenda. The Chair gave some background to this item and the two national events already marked – Black Lives Matter and the NHS anniversary – which were achieved by the loan of lights from Ben Turner of Slideshow Productions. The Chair was keen to ensure this offer remained special and to compliment the Council’s flag flying protocols. She had received a request to mark the Baby Loss Awareness week in October and therefore considered this a good timescale for implementation – but acknowledged more research was required to ensure the Policy was right. The Town Clerk confirmed that she would contact other Town Councils in order to obtain example policies.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted and:

1. that further research in to a policy for “lighting up” the interior of the Corn Exchange, marking community and national campaigns be undertaken, and report back to the next meeting of this Committee;
2. that the Council considers purchasing fixed colour changing led lights for the Corn Exchange windows, up to the value of £500 and that this be delegated to Cllr Ashbourne and the Office Manager.

F203 YOUTH SERVICES GRANT FUNDING

Cllr Collins left the meeting at 7.12pm.

Members received and considered the revised policy for Youth Services Grant Funding, which had been recommended by the Stronger Communities Committee at its meeting on 6 July 2020.

RECOMMENDED: that the policy as now presented be agreed.

F204 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: that in accordance with section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admissions 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.

F205 **DEBTOR REPORT**

Confidential Item.

F206 **SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS.**

RESOLVED: that as the meeting had now reached two hours in length, that standing order 48 be suspended in order to allow the meeting to continue.

F207 **PROPERTY MATTERS**

Confidential item.

Cllr Eaglestone left the meeting at this point as he declared an interest in the item being discussed.

F208 **STAFFING MATTERS**

Confidential Item.

The meeting closed at: 8.07 pm

Chair