

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

Held on Monday, 22 March 2021

At 6.00 pm in the Virtual Meeting Room via Zoom

Present:

Councillor L Ashbourne (Chair)

Councillors:	J Aitman	V Gwatkin
	O Collins	M Jones
	H Eaglestone	R Smith
Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
Others:	2 members of the public.	

F142 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Cllr D Harvey.

F143 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no interests declared by members at the meeting.

F144 MINUTES

The committee received the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee held on 1 February 2021.

F145 TO ADOPT AND SIGN AS CORRECT THE MINUTES OF 1ST FEBRUARY 2021

That the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 1 February 2021 were a correct record and should be signed by the Chair.

F146 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF 1ST FEBRUARY 2021

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 1 February 2021.

F147 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Committee adjourned for this item.

Ron Spurs, Chair of the Witney Carnival Committee addressed the Committee on agenda item 7, regarding its financial request towards this year's Carnival.

Eric Marshall of the Witney Music Festival addressed the Committee on agenda item 12 (a), regarding its request for financial request towards an event this summer.

The meeting reconvened following Public Participation

F148 FINANCE REPORT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk concerning financial implications from the Council's spending committees in the previous cycle.

Members were in agreement that additional funds should be allocated to the Corn Exchange refurbishment project to ensure the best possible outcome of the project.

The Committee also discussed the request for £4000 from the Witney Carnival Committee towards this year's event, referred by the Stronger Communities Committee. Members were wholly supportive of the Carnival which would be a welcome relief for families this summer and an underspend in the discretionary grants budget for 2020-21 had been identified.

There were however still some concerns that the Council would risk losing funds should the lockdown roadmap vary, and the event be cancelled. The Carnival Committee had advised it would not enter into any contracts and would be willing to work with the Council to ensure there was minimal financial risk.

As there was another event also requesting funding it was agreed that the Carnival Committee be awarded 50% of its requested amount, totalling £2,000, this increasing to 65%, totalling £2,600 depending on the outcome of later grant applications. This seemed the fairest way of dispersing the underspend, superseding the original budgets for either event in 2021-22.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted; and,
2. That the recommendations from the spending committees be approved and specifically the request for an additional £2000.00 from the Corn Exchange Working Party to cover professional fees for the phase two refurbishment be agreed; and,
3. That Witney Town Council agrees to cover at least 50% (£2000.00) of the grant request from the Witney Carnival towards this year's event. This figure increased to £2,600 which was 65% following the dispersal of other grant requests later in the meeting; and,
4. That this be funded from an underspend of the discretionary grants budget 2020-21.

F149 DISCRETIONARY GRANT APPLICATIONS

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning discretionary grant applications from Oxfordshire Association of Blind, Life Education Wessex & Thames Valley and Carterton Gymnastics Club.

Members were supportive all three applications and were curious if Life Education Wessex would be delivering their training to other primary schools in Witney. While the Carterton Gymnastics Club would clearly be used by Witney residents, the maximum award of a grant was

£500 and could not be increased. Members agreed the policy will be looked at in the new financial year so a further application could be made at that time.

Having now made these additional grant awards the Officers were able to confirm the balance remaining in the discretionary grants budget – which had previously been agreed to roll over to the next financial year and would now be earmarked for the Witney Carnival and Witney Music Festival events if were able to go ahead COVID-19 permitting.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report of the Deputy Town Clerk be noted; and,
2. That the Oxfordshire Association of Blind be awarded the sum of £500; and,
3. That Life Education Wessex be awarded the sum of £300; and,
4. That Carterton Gymnastics Club be awarded the sum of £500; and,
5. That these grants be awarded under the General Power of Competence; and;
6. That the request from Witney Educational Foundation to be linked to the Town Council's website be accepted; and
7. That the correspondence from Witney Pride and Dance for Life be noted.

F150 **GRANT REQUEST - WITNEY MUSIC FESTIVAL**

The Committee received a funding request from Witney Music Festival towards an event in Witney during the summer of 2021.

Members had heard that a venue for the event was proving problematic but were supportive and had identified an underspent budget where funds could be awarded from. As there were two events vying for the funding it was agreed that both would receive 65% of the amount requested.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Town Council pledges 65% totalling £9,750 of the requested £15,000 towards this event; and,
2. That this is awarded from an underspend in the discretionary grants budget 2020-21.

F151 **EXTENSION TO FOOTBALL SEASON AND TRAINING - POLICY & FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Operations & Estates Advisor concerning the extension of the football season and requests for training pitches throughout the summer.

This issue had been referred from the Sport & Play Committee at its meeting on 1 March 2021 (minute SP101) and there was consensus that a delicate balancing act would be required. The initial proposals on how this could be accommodated had been forwarded to the Oxfordshire FA who had welcomed them and passed the information onto the clubs. There was agreement that

the proposals contained in the report offered the best compromise the Council could make to accommodate matches, training, cricket and pitch renovations.

Members noted these arrangements would only apply for the summer of 2020, in response to the pandemic and clubs should initially book the Witney ATP, as requested by the Oxfordshire F.A, before booking training on the Council's pitches.

There was some concern on the potential charge for training, but members understood that maintaining and marking out pitches for the extension would result in a significant, unbudgeted charge to the Council. It was agreed that a nominal fee of £15 per pitch for training, which equated to approximately half the cost of a junior pitch hire would off-set some of these costs; more than one team would also be able to use a pitch at a time. If a club could not afford the training costs, they could submit a grant form to the Council for consideration but there was still the opportunity that clubs could use King George's and Eton Close recreation areas free of charge.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted; and,
2. That Witney Town Council charges a nominal fee of £15 per training session on marked pitches at Burwell, the Leys and West Witney Recreation Grounds; and,
3. That Witney Town Council writes to West Oxfordshire District Council asking how it can assist with these issues, in particular regarding subsidised use of the Witney ATP for football clubs; and,
4. That Witney Town Council writes to the Oxfordshire Football Association and individual football clubs explaining the situation with pitches this summer, particularly highlighting the offer of free as well as chargeable training spaces; and,
5. That these arrangements are for the summer of 2021 only, in response to the issues arising from the Covid-19 Pandemic.

F152 **PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk with associated payment schedules, bank statements and reconciliations.

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
DDs and Standing Orders	£3,824.76	General CB 1
Cheques 32950—32974, DDs and	£139,823.39	Imprest CB 2

Standing Orders		
-----------------	--	--

F153 **INTERIM AUDIT REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the Interim Audit Report for 2020-21 from the Council's internal auditors, Accounting Solutions.

Members heard that the audit had been carried out remotely and were satisfied with the findings given the difficult circumstances of the last year.

RESOLVED:

That the Interim Audit Report for 2020-21 prepared by the Councillors internal auditor be noted.

F154 **EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERNAL CONTROL: CORPORATE & FINANCIAL RISK ASSESSMENT 2020/21**

The Committee received and considered the Corporate & Financial Risk Assessment, policy and accompanying report of the Town Clerk.

Members were advised this was a requirement of the annual audit to ensure effective internal controls were in place. The Action Plan identified and flagged risks to the Council which would be circulated to current and newly appointed officers to ensure mitigating measures where possible.

RESOLVED:

That the Risk Management Policy and Corporate & Financial Risk Assessment for 2020-21 be noted and endorsed by Witney Town Council.

F155 **BANKING ARRANGEMENTS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk concerning the Council's banking arrangements.

Members agreed that the arrangements should be amended to reflect the new staffing changes at the Council. It was suggested that recommendations proposing members of this committee as signatories should be finalised at the Annual Meeting of the Council due to possible membership changes at that time.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted; and,
2. That the Deputy Town Clerk be listed as a cheque signatory on the Barclays Bank Imprest Account and being able to sign cheques up to £5,000;
3. That the Responsible Finance Officer and in their absence the Administrative Support Assistant: Policy, Governance & Finance, 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;

That the following items be agreed but finalised at the Annual Meeting of the Town Council on 12 May 2021.

4. That the Members of the Policy, Governance and Finance Committee be authorised signatories on Barclays Bank mandates and if necessary two members be named to be able to act on behalf of the Council – in the absence of the Town Clerk, should the need arise;
5. 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;
6. 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;
7. 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 a future meeting of this Committee.

F156 INSURANCE RENEWAL 2021/22

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk concerning the Town Council's insurance renewal.

Members noted the longstanding service provided by Zurich but wanted to assure the best possible deal had been received to protect the Council's finances. There was discussion on whether to include terrorism cover and observations on the property details in the attached schedule.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted; and,
2. That the Town Council delegates the negotiation of the insurance renewal to the Town Clerk; and,
3. That the cover, including terrorism terms should be with Zurich Municipal for a period of three years.

F157 YOUTH FUNDING GRANT 2020-21

The Committee received update reports from Got2B CIC, Home-Start Oxford and Junior parkrun concerning projects funded by the Town Council's Youth Funding Award in 2020.

Members welcomed the updates, as part of the grants review and monitoring criteria, and were pleased to hear how the funds were making a difference to the youth of Witney.

RESOLVED:

That the update reports from Got2B CIC, Home-Start Oxford and Junior parkrun be noted.

F158 **ANNUAL TOWN MEETING**

The Committee received a verbal update from the Town Clerk on the possible date and format of this year's Annual Town Meeting.

This item had been deferred from the last meeting of this Committee held in February 2021, for further consideration in light of upcoming relaxation in COVID restrictions and the roadmap. A provisional date of 26th May had previously been set. Although a face-to-face meeting would be beneficial for the electorate, there were concerns that this would place attendees at risk and the numbers would be severely reduced due to ongoing pandemic lockdown restrictions. The Town Clerk offered to seek advice from the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) on this issue and the legalities around holding it.

RESOLVED:

That the decision on the date and format of the 2021 Annual Town Meeting be delegated to the Town Clerk and Leader of the Town Council.

F159 **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.

F160 **WEST WITNEY SPORTS GROUND**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Project Officer concerning temporary facilities and the club house at West Witney Sports Ground.

Officers had reviewed this project and following a recommendation from the Sport & Play Committee that temporary changing facilities should be F.A Compliant, the cost and timeframe for delivery had made this option impossible to deliver before 17th May 2021.

Members were disappointed and agreed the only option available for sports clubs this summer would be for the compliance work detailed in previous meetings to be undertaken at the earliest opportunity. There was agreement that detailed elements could be shared, carried out and paid for by each party before 10th May 2021. This would result in the facilities being compliant until further funding could be sourced in the next two years.

It was agreed that rental charges up until 17th May 2021 should be subsidised by the Town Council and further dialogue would be needed as soon as possible on the above course of action.

RESOLVED:

1. That the confidential report be noted; and,
2. That Witney Town Council works with West Witney Sports & Social Club to share the outstanding compliance issues to bring the club back and changing facilities into use in time

for 17th May 2021, on the proviso that the clubhouse will be closed in 2 years and during that time the Town Council will work with other agencies and partners to secure funding for a new facility; and,

3. That each party pays for their identified works as detailed; and,
4. That Witney Town Council subsidises the rent at West Witney Sports & Social Club until 17th May 2021; and,
5. That the Town Clerk contacts the Club at the earliest opportunity to discuss these matters.

Cllr M Jones left the meeting at 8.07pm.

F161 PROPERTY AND LEGAL MATTERS

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk concerning the Town House in Market Square, Windrush Cemetery access, Park Road Play Area and Park Road Allotments.

RESOLVED:

1. That the confidential report of the Town Clerk be noted; and,
2. That the Town Clerk continues negotiations with Cottsway Housing on the lease for Park Road Play Area; and,
3. That the tenure on allotment land at Park Road be given back to Cottsway Housing as owners, with a request that a biodiversity space is created.

The Committee adjourned at 8.26pm to hold a meeting of the Personnel Sub-Committee.

The Committee reconvened at 8.58pm.

F162 STAFFING MATTERS

The Committee received and considered the verbal of update from the Chair of the Personnel Sub-Committee following its earlier meeting.

Members also received the minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee meetings held on 1, 3, 10, 17 & 24 February 2021 and 18 March 2021.

RESOLVED:

1. That the verbal update from the Chair of the Personnel Sub-Committee be noted.
2. That minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee meetings held on 1, 3, 10, 17 & 24 February 2021 and 18 March 2021, and recommendations therein be agreed.

The meeting closed at: 9.00 pm

Chair