

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

**Held on Monday, 27 September 2021**

**At 6.00 pm in the Main Hall, The Corn Exchange, Witney**

**Present:**

Councillor R Smith (Chair)

Councillors:	J Aitman	V Gwatkin
	H Eaglestone	M Jones
Officers:	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
Others:	4 members of the public.	

**F493 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for their absence were received from Cllrs L Ashbourne, O Collins and D Harvey.

**F494 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no interests declared by members of officers.

**F495 MINUTES**

The Committee received the minutes of the meeting held on 26 July 2021.

A member asked on progress relating to minute number F398. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that Baby-bonding sessions could be referred through Home-Start Oxford and the organizer was hoping to be able to provide these during October.

**Resolved:**

That, the minutes of the meeting held on 26 July 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**F496 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The committee adjourned for this item.

Rev'd Simon Kirby of St Mary's Church Cogges, Peter Claridge of Witney Mills Cricket Club and Graeme & Linda Young of Witney Day Centre addressed the committee regarding their respective discretionary grant applications.

*The Committee reconvened following the representations.*

F497 **GRANTS & SUBSIDISED LETTINGS**

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

All the projects offered benefits to the community of Witney but the budget for awards would regrettably not stretch to provide the whole amount requested, with a second round of grants due later in the financial year. To stretch the budget, it was proposed and carried that, unused funds for Witney Carnival in 2021 totalling £2,600 be returned to this grant budget for the remainder of the year.

Members felt the request from Buttercross Theatre Productions could be sought from another source and likewise, St Mary's Church Cogges may be better placed to seek funding from alternative grant funders. Members were satisfied that the latter of these projects would be providing a community facility and if no other funding was available the Town Council would support it.

Following a recommendation from the Stronger Communities Committee, this Committee agreed the sum of £9,750, allocated from the discretionary grants budget towards Witney Music Festival 2021 should be allocated to increase the budget for the Youth Services Grant 2021.

The Deputy Town Clerk also raised a request from an applicant who would be holding a Circus on The Leys to have the cost of a day subsidised as funds were being raised on the given day towards the Charity, NHS Together.

**Recommended:**

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, £2,600 allocated towards the Witney Carnival 2021 be returned to the discretionary grants fund (4100/407) and,
3. That, Parkrun be awarded the sum of £385 and,
4. That, Witney Day Centre be awarded the sum of £2,310 and,
5. That, Witney Mills Cricket Club be awarded the sum of £2,079 and,
6. That, St Mary's Church Cogges be provisionally awarded the sum of £1,540 but that other funding opportunities be explored before this sum is released.
7. That, the request for a subsidised let for one day on the Leys be agreed for the sum of £162.50.
8. That, the above grants be made under the General Power of Competence and that the recipients be asked to acknowledge the Council's financial contribution in their promotional literature.
9. That, Buttercross Theatre Productions be asked to seek an alternative source for the funds required for camera equipment.
10. That, £9,750 from the discretionary grants budget (4100/407), previously earmarked for Witney Music festival 2021 be re-allocated towards the Youth Services Grant budget for 2021.

F498 **ROTARY CLUB OF WITNEY - CHRISTMAS LIGHTS SWITCH-ON**

The Committee considered a request from the Rotary Club of Witney for funds towards a switch-on event for the Witney Christmas Lights in November 2021.

Members were supportive of the application and although the request was slightly over the anticipated budget, it could be covered from funds unused for the 2021 Witney Carnival, also run by the Rotary Club.

**Resolved:**

That, the request for £2,100 from the Rotary Club of Witney towards the Witney Christmas Lights Switch-on event be granted.

That the grant be awarded under the General Power of Competence and that the Council's financial contribution be acknowledged on any promotional literature accompanying the event.

F499 **COMMITTEE WORK PLAN**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk concerning the Committee Work Plan.

The report outlined the current status of matters arising from the adopted Open Spaces Strategy and asked for any 2022/23 budget considerations. Members were pleased many of the items on the plan were underway, including rebranding, and the review of the Grounds Maintenance Contract. There were requests for the discretionary grants pot to be increased so more community groups could receive aid and that a budget for a water safety education programme could be included, the latter being funded in part from differing stakeholders.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the report and workplan be noted and,
2. That, the funds for Discretionary Grants be increased to £20,000 in the draft 2022/23 budget (the policy to include a scoring system for applications) and,
3. That, £10,000 be included in the draft 2022/23 budget for water safety education.

F500 **YOUTH SERVICES GRANT AWARDS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk outlining the recommendations on distribution of this fund by the Stronger Communities Committee.

Members agreed that the applicants were all worthy of the requested funds but given the financial confinement of the awards they were unable to provide the full amounts. The awards demonstrated a fair approach to all and constituted over 75% of the funds applied for.

Members were in agreement that the funds should be spent on projects relating to Witney and not wholly on administrative running costs.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the recommendations on distribution of the Youth Services Grant 2021 made by the Stronger Communities Committee be agreed, these being:
  - a) That, Got2B Community Interest Company be awarded the sum of £18,693
  - b) That, Home-Start Oxford be awarded the sum of £9,318
  - c) That, Oxfordshire Music & Arts Trust be awarded the sum of £7,668
  - d) That, Synolos be awarded the sum of £4,068
  - e) That, the above financial awards be made under the General Power of Competence and recipients be asked to acknowledge the Council's financial contribution in their promotional literature.

**F501 PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS**

The Committee received the report of the Responsible Financial Officer outlining payment schedules, bank statements and bank reconciliations which are brought to the Policy, Governance & Finance committee as part of the Council's due diligence.

The Town Clerk provided an update to members on the Council's bank mandate and advised members of the committee they would be contacted to attend the bank with ID in the near future.

**Recommended:**

Members noted the report, the bank reconciliations and agreed the following schedule of payments be approved:

<b>Cheque No's</b>	<b>In the sum of:</b>	<b>Account</b>
DDs and Standing Orders July	£3,490.32	General CB 1
Cheques 33154 - 33194, DDs and Standing Orders July	£88,006.31	Imprest CB 2
DDs and Standing Orders August	£3,246.13	General CB 1
Cheques 33195 - 33221, DDs and Standing Orders August	£102,750.00	Imprest CB 2

**F502 FINANCIAL REPORT & ASSOCIATED MATTERS**

The Committee received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk. Members were presented detailed income and expenditure updates on the Council's budgets until 31 August 2021 and received the recommendations of the spending committees in this cycle of meetings.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised Officers were finding it increasingly difficult to procure raw materials directly, as were the Councils Contractors and Suppliers. Several national issues had led to this delay and associated increased costs.

**Resolved:**

1. That the report be noted, and;
2. That, the recommendations of the spending committees, as detailed, be agreed.

**F503 BUDGET PARAMETERS 2022/23, CAPITAL & SPECIAL REVENUE PROJECTS 2022/23 AND BEYOND**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer concerning Budget parameters for 2022/23.

Members were mindful that the Covid-19 pandemic had affected the finances of residents and organisations but had to balance that consideration with the need to improve and potentially expand services. It was agreed that any increase for fees and charges should be linked to inflation and any Council Tax Levy increase should not be constrained at this point.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the report be noted, and;
2. That, the fees and charges of the Town Council for 2022/23 rise in line with inflation, and;
3. That, the percentage increase to the Band D equivalent Council Tax Levy be considered once a draft budget has been produced.

**F504 REVIEW OF INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICES**

The Committee received the report of the Responsible Financial Officer concerning the appointment of an Internal Auditor for the Council.

Members were encouraged to see the current auditors had initiated the review and considered each of the company's quotes and documentation in turn. It was felt that one offered more diligent checks through rotation of auditors and the time needed for the most thorough service.

**Resolved:**

That, Auditing Solutions be employed as the internal auditors for Witney Town Council.

**F505 CHANGES TO THE GROUNDS CONTRACTS - ADDITIONAL COSTS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Operations and Estates Advisor concerning potential changes to the Grounds Maintenance Contract.

One change was for the inclusion of wildflower areas in the closed churchyards of Holy Trinity and St Mary's churches. The churches had approached the Town Council in the summer asking for wildflower planting in set areas to help reach eco church status. Although the Council had initially agreed to this request, unfortunately financial implications had since been forthcoming. Members, while still keen to support the scheme were advised no budget was in place for this scheme so it would have to be declined and further dialogue with the church should take place.

The second item concerned land adjacent to Burwell Car Park, Thorney Leys which, it had been established was in the Town Council's ownership. Members agreed that this piece of land was causing issues for the residents so would need to be cleared and added to the annual contract.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the additional wildflower planting at the closed churchyards in Witney be refused and,
3. That, the additional works on Council owned land at Burwell Car Park be carried out for the one-off supplementary estimate £1,400 from the general fund and added to the Grounds Maintenance Contract annually.

F506 **WINDRUSH CEMETERY - MARKING OF FUTURE BURIAL PLOTS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Operations & Estates Advisor concerning the marking of new grave spaces at Windrush Cemetery.

Members agreed this was a necessity as part of a wider project in cemetery mapping and planning for the future development of the site.

**Resolved:**

That, datum markers be provided for newly marked grave spaces at Windrush Cemetery by Cemetery Design Services for the sum of £2,580 (exc. VAT), this being a supplementary estimate from the general fund.

F507 **OFFICE 365**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning the migration of the Council's IT software suite to Office 365.

Members were supportive of this action which would bring the Council in line with other organisations. It would have the added benefit of increasing internal communications through an extranet and allowing workflow to be accessed through Share Point. There was a question of cost with no budget set for this project, but officers advised there may be other options which could be investigated to ensure the best value for the Council.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the Council should migrate to Office 365 and,
2. That, this be delegated to the Deputy Town Clerk to progress at the best value.

F508 **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.

F509 **PROPERTY & LEGAL MATTERS**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk concerning property and legal matters.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the confidential report be noted and,
2. That, the revised terms for the lease from Cottsway Housing concerning the land at Park Road Play Area be agreed, subject to provision of an equivalent or better Play Area being provided should the land be requested back at each break point in the lease and,
3. That, the annual lease for the Play Area at Park Road be agreed to the sum of £125 per annum.
4. That, the Town Clerk's confidential verbal report on the legal advice on the lake incident be noted.

Cllr M Jones left the meeting at 7.57pm.

**F510 SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 48(A)**

**Resolved:**

That, Standing Order 48 (a) be suspended to allow the meeting to continue as it had now passed two hours in length.

**F511 TOWN HALL WINDOW REPAIRS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Operations & Estates Advisor concerning works to the windows at the Town Hall and 51 Market Square, Witney.

Members were unable to reach a conclusion on who to award the works to due to the disparity in the quotes received. Further information would be needed so that a fair comparison could be considered.

**Resolved:**

That, the decision on window repairs be deferred until the next meeting of this committee so further information can be sought from officers on the works and quotes received.

**F512 STAFFING MATTERS**

The Committee received and considered the confidential minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee meeting held on 23 September 2021.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the confidential minutes of the Personnel Sub-committee held on 23 September 2021 be noted, and the recommendations contained therein approved.

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The meeting closed at: 8.12 pm

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Chair