

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

Held on Monday, 28 March 2022

At 6.00 pm in the Virtual Meeting Room via Zoom

Present:

R Smith (Vice-Chair in the chair)

Councillors:	L Ashbourne	H Eaglestone
	R Smith	V Gwatkin
	J Aitman	M Jones
Officers:	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Simon Wright	Democratic & Legal Services Officer
Others:	No members of the public.	

As there was no legislation in place for the Town Council to hold virtual meetings, and because of the ongoing Covid-19 Pandemic, the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee formed virtually as an Advisory Committee. Any recommendations outside of the current work programme, budget or policy would require ratification at the Full Council meeting held on 11 April 2022.

The committee was advised that Councillor Smith, as Vice-Chair of the committee, would be chairing the meeting to ensure consistency with previous meetings when the Chair had been unavailable.

F135 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Collins & Harvey

F136 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from members or officers.

F137 MINUTES

The Committee received the minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2022.

Minute F53 – The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that the Annual Town Meeting was to be held on 25 April 2022. The Chairs of committees would be contacted about annual reports for the meeting.

Minute F55 – The Deputy Town Clerk advised that Microsoft 365 would be installed on 1 April. Members would be receiving new login details in due course.

Minute F60 – The committee noted that the proposed Town Hall works had been approved and the project was now progressing.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

F138 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Committee adjourned for this item.

Katie Lewis representing Anchora addressed the committee in respect of a subsidised letting request for consideration under Agenda Item. 10.

The Committee reconvened following public participation.

F139 PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS

The Committee received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk 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.

Recommended:

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

Cheque No's	In the sum of:	Account
Cheques 101170-101173, DDs, and Standing Orders January 2022	£214,500.25	General CB 1
Cheques 33409-33427, DDs, and Standing Orders January 2022	£115,832.72	Imprest CB 2
Cheques 101174-101177, DDs, and Standing Orders February 2022	£41,902.52	General CB 1
Cheques 33428-33461, DDs, and Standing Orders February 2022	£106,588.11	Imprest CB 2

F140 FINANCIAL REPORT & ASSOCIATED MATTERS

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

Members noted that the recommendations from other committees would be funded within the current fiscal year, apart from where stated.

In respect of a traffic calming scheme at The Leys it was reported that Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) had confirmed that funding of £20k was available for the scheme leaving a contribution of £5k from the Town Council. Members agreed to support the implementation of a scheme and that local residents be informally consulted ahead of any statutory consultation by OCC.

The committee noted the additional expenditure, of £3080, for retractable seating at the Corn Exchange as agreed by the Town Clerk under delegated powers.

The committee considered the annual contribution of £10k for CCTV provision in the town. The Town Clerk updated Members on the current situation and it was noted that new CCTV provision was being considered by the District Council. Members welcomed the opportunity to scrutinise the payment and raised concern regarding the lack of data available and the cessation of the CCTV management group.

After discussion it was agreed that a letter be sent to West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) seeking further information about the current position with the scheme and requesting data on the use of the system with a further report being presented to members.

The committee noted the renewal of the gas & electricity contracts and insurance cover. In addition an update regarding the bank mandate and employment of an independent stock taker for the bar operations was received.

The committee considered a confidential report regarding a debt owed to the council. The committee received correspondence from the debtor and considered options outlined in the report. After discussion it was agreed the debtor be advised that the council does not accept the invoice submitted and requests full payment of outstanding monies as per the proposed repayment plan.

The Town Clerk provided a confidential verbal update regarding a request from a tenant of the council seeking a reduction in rent on a recently agreed contract. The committee considered the request and recommended that no change to the contract be agreed.

Recommended:

1. That, the recommendations of the spending committees as detailed in the report be approved;
2. That, the design for The Leys Traffic Calming scheme and associated costs, as presented by Oxfordshire County Council be approved;
3. That, the additional funding for the retractable seating at the Corn Exchange, as agreed by the Town Clerk under delegations be noted;
4. That, a letter be sent to West Oxfordshire District Council seeking further information about the current position with the CCTV scheme and requesting data on the use of the system with a further report being presented to members;
5. That, the Gas & Electricity Contracts renewal be noted;
6. That, the 2022 Insurance renewal premium be noted;
7. That, the information regarding the Town Council Bank Mandate be noted;
8. That, the employment of an independent stock-taker for the Council's Bar Operations be noted;
9. That, the debtor be advised that the council does not accept the invoice submitted and requests full payment of outstanding monies as per the proposed repayment plan; and
10. That, the request from a tenant for a reduction in rent be refused and the existing contract terms be retained.

F141 **INTERIM AUDIT REPORT**

The committee considered the Interim Audit Report 2021-22 from the Council's internal auditors.

Members welcomed the report and in response to a question it was confirmed that the insurance fidelity guarantee cover had been increased in line with the recommendation in the report as part of this year's annual renewal.

Recommended:

1. That, the Interim Audit Report 2021-2022 from the Council's internal auditors be received; and
2. That, the balance of the Council's petty cash float as £500, verified by the Deputy Town Clerk, in line with the Council's financial regulations be noted

F142 **EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERNAL CONTROL: CORPORATE & FINANCIAL RISK ASSESSMENT 2021/22**

Consideration was given to the report of the Town Clerk/C.E.O. regarding the Risk Management Policy and Corporate & Financial Risk Assessment for 2021-22.

Recommended:

That, the report be noted and the Risk Management Policy & Corporate Risk Assessment for the financial year 2021-22 be endorsed.

F143 **DISCRETIONARY GRANT POLICY REVIEW**

Consideration was given to the report of the Deputy Town Clerk seeking a review of the Discretionary Grant Policy following six months of operation.

It was noted that funding was currently considered at the March & September meetings which could cause some issues as the March meeting was close to end of the financial year. It was suggested and agreed that funding dates should be June and January instead. The committee supported the continuation of the scheme as currently operating subject to the change of dates.

Recommended:

That, the bi-annual discretionary grant process be continued on the current basis with funding dates be amended to June and January each year.

F144 **GRANTS AND SUBSIDISED LETTING APPLICATIONS**

The committee considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk outlining applications and confidential financial information for Discretionary Grants, Subsidised Lettings and Additional Finance Requests.

Discretionary Grant Applications

The Rotary Club of Witney – The committee supported the allocation of £500 towards the Witney Colour Run 2022. It was noted that a grant had already been given for this in the current fiscal year but this was because of a delay in last years event due to Covid-19.

Windrush Radio – Members, whilst supporting the work of Windrush Radio, considered that there was insufficient detail and financial information in the application for a decision to be made. It was suggested that officers liaise with the applicants in respect of a revised application in the future.

Anchora – It was noted that no specific application had been made but the applicant be encouraged to submit something in the future in line with the criteria. Members suggested other potential funding sources and other organisations that may be able to provide advice and support.

Subsidised Letting Applications

Anchora – The committee supported the subsidised use of the Corn Exchange for a fundraising event to be held in July.

Witney Swifts Cricket Club – Members agreed a retrospective request for a subsidised letting at West Witney Sports Ground as the match was for a Special President’s Cup match.

Witney Photo Group - A request of for subsidised letting at the Corn Exchange in June 2022 for a photographic exhibition of members’ work was supported.

Additional Financial Assistance Requests

Oxfordshire Play Association (OPA) – It was noted that OPA will be providing a Play Day in June 2022 to coincide with the Platinum Jubilee Commemorations and as the event would be going ahead officers would release the £1,000 budgeted towards this event.

Witney Carnival Committee – The committee considered a request for £1,000 towards the Witney Carnival 2022. This was in addition to the £1,100 already budgeted towards toilets and free use of the Leys.

Members noted that this was a reduced request and it had been indicated that additional funding was unlikely to be needed in the future as the Carnival Committee would be able to increase fundraising activity post covid. It was agreed to support the request.

Witney Music Festival – It was noted that the Stronger Communities Committee had received a request from the festival organisers to agree a future partnership with the Town Council to hold an annual event on the Leys. This would involve funding £10,000 so the event could run and then receiving the funds back (with a 10% return) after the event.

The committee considered the financial implications and the feasibility of partnership working in the future. It was confirmed that the festival received free use of The Leys and support from the Town Council with regard to other infrastructure. Members agreed it was not appropriate to provide a loan but a grant of £2500 could be provided this year.

Recommended:

1. That, in respect of Discretionary Grants The Rotary Club of Witney be awarded £500 towards the Witney Colour Run 2022;
2. That, the application by Windrush Radio for £2000 towards outside broadcasting equipment be not supported and the applicants be asked to resubmit with more details and financial information;
3. That, no award be made to Anchora but that they be encouraged submit an application in the future in line with the criteria;
4. That, subsidised lettings be approved for Anchora, Witney Swifts Cricket Club and Witney Photo Group as detailed in the report;
5. That these grants be awarded under the General Power of Competence and that the recipients be asked to acknowledge the Council's financial contribution in their promotional literature.
6. That, the payment of £1,000 to Oxfordshire Play Association be noted;
7. That, £1000 be awarded to Witney Carnival Committee from an underspend in the grants budget; and
8. That, £2500 be awarded to Witney Music Festival from an underspend in the grants budget.

Councillor Ashbourne left the meeting at this juncture.

Suspension of Standing Orders - As the meeting had now reached over 2 hours in length, the Committee agreed to suspend standing order 48 in order to allow the meeting to continue for a further 25 minutes.

F145 GRANT MONITORING 2021-22

The committee considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk updating on large grants distributed by the Town Council as part of the Council's due diligence.

Recommended:

That, the report and accompanying updates be noted.

F146 MEMBERSHIP TO SUPPORTING/ADVISORY ORGANISATIONS

Consideration was given to the report of the Town Clerk/C.E.O. regarding a review of subscriptions and memberships the Council currently has to supporting and advisory organisations.

Members supported continuation of membership fees to the Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils (NALC). It was agreed to cancel membership of the Rural Market Town Group and note the continued free membership of the Co-operative Council's Innovation Network for the forthcoming year. It was noted that advice had been received from South East Employers during the year.

Recommended:

1. That, the payment of the membership fees to Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils (NALC) be authorised;
2. That, membership to the Rural Market Town Group be cancelled; and
3. That, membership of the Co-operative Council's Innovation Network be continued for another year, as its free, but this be reviewed nearer the next renewal date

F147 **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.

F148 **PROPERTY & LEGAL MATTERS**

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

Recommended:

1. That, negotiations on the rent review of the Town Hall and Town House be progressed on the basis outlined in the report; and
2. That, the Council agrees in principle to forming a consortium as outlined in the report and making a contribution up to £25k – subject to identifying where this can be funded from and clarification on legal matters associated with this transaction in respect of the land identified in the report.

F149 **MAJOR/SPECIAL PROJECTS**

The committee received a confidential verbal report from the Town Clerk/C.E.O.

It was reported that discussions were ongoing with relevant officers at West Oxfordshire District Council regarding 3G pitch provision in Witney.

Recommended:

That, the confidential verbal update be noted.

Councillor Jones left the meeting at this juncture.

F150 **GROUNDS MAINTENANCE SERVICE**

A confidential verbal update was received from the Town Clerk/C.E.O.

Recommended:

That the confidential verbal update be noted.

F151 **STAFFING MATTERS**

The Committee received and considered the confidential minutes of the Personnel Sub Committee meeting held on 23 March and a verbal update on the meeting held prior to this committee.

Recommended:

That, the confidential minutes of the Personnel Sub-committee held on 23 March 2022 and confidential verbal update on the meeting earlier be noted, and the recommendations contained therein approved.

The meeting closed at: 8.22 pm

Chair