

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

Held on Monday, 3 October 2022

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

Present:

Councillor J Aitman (Chair)

Councillors:	O Collins L Duncan H Eaglestone	V Gwatkin R Smith
Officers:	Adam Clapton Sharon Groth Derek Mackenzie	Deputy Town Clerk Town Clerk Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
Others:	None.	

F488 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Jones and Councillor D Harvey.

F489 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or officers.

F490 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 18 July 2022 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee held 18 July 2022 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

F491 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Committee adjourned for this item.

The Committee received representations from Barry Beadle of Volunteer Link Up regarding Agenda Item 10b.

The Committee reconvened

F492 **ANNUAL GRANT - VOLUNTEER LINK UP (VLU)**

With the permission of the Chair, this item was moved up the agenda so the member of public could hear the discussion and outcome.

The Committee received and considered the report from the Deputy Town Clerk.

Members considered what value VLU provided to the community and how important that was at a time when spending was such an issue for residents.

Members also discussed the amount of the annual grant. It had remained at £500 for a number of years but the request before them was for an increased amount of £2,000. Members were supportive of the request and asked to see this reviewed when the budget was set for 2023/24

A vote was called on the proposed increase with all Members being in favour apart from Councillor H Eaglestone who voted against awarding the additional £1,500 grant.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the additional £1,500 grant for Volunteer Link Up is awarded and,
3. That, this grant be awarded under the General Power of Competence from budget line (4162/407) and the remaining £1,500 funded from the Grants General budget line (4100/407),
4. That, the annual grant is reviewed and increased when the 2023/24 budget is set.

With the express permission on the Chair, Jeff Hunter of Courtside Hubs then addressed the Committee regarding a matter included under Agenda Item 14.

F493 **PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS**

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

Resolved:

That, the report, bank statements and reconciliations be noted, and the following schedule of payments be approved:

Cheque No's	In the sum of:	Account
Cheques 101185-101187, DDs, and Standing Orders June 2022	£36,521.35	General CB 1
Cheques 33582-33643, DDs, and Standing Orders June 2022	£149,308.88	Imprest CB 2
Cheque 101188, DDs, and Standing Orders July 2022	£14,678.72	General CB 1
Cheques 33644-33679, DDs, and Standing Orders July 2022	£135,376.01	Imprest CB 2

DD's and Standing Orders August 2022	£4,920.42	General CB 1
Cheques 33680-33712, DDs, BACs, and Standing Orders August 2022	£137,704.62	Imprest CB 2

F494 **EXTERNAL AUDIT - OPTION TO OPT OUT OF THE SAAA CENTRAL EXTERNAL AUDITOR APPOINTMENT ARRANGEMENTS**

The Committee received and considered the correspondence from SAAA Ltd regarding the option to opt-out of the appointment of external auditors. The Town Clerk explained what this would entail and the risks to the Council. The Committee agreed unanimously to continue with the current arrangements.

Resolved:

1. That, the correspondence and verbal update be noted, and
2. That, the Council remains opted in to the SAAA Ltd arrangements.

F495 **CONCLUSION OF AUDIT FOR YEAR ENDING 31ST MARCH 2022**

The Members reviewed the correspondence received from the Council's External Auditor, Moore, and thanked the officers for their work in achieving the certification in a difficult year.

The Town Clerk confirmed that the certificates had been published for public view.

Resolved:

That, the outcome of the review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return for year ended 31 March 2022 be noted.

F496 **FINANCIAL REPORT & ASSOCIATED FINANCIAL MATTERS**

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

PR446 – A member advised that the £1,250 was for the cost of anti-slip testing, should it be required, and not the cost for re-coating the courts. However the Town Clerk was able to provide an update that the Witney Lawn Tennis club had reported that the courts were not as slippery – therefore it was unlikely the Council needed to proceed with this slip test after all.

Regarding the Corn Exchange pavement licence, District Council Member at the meeting advised that the £100 cost of the renewal would be waived by West Oxfordshire District Council.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted, and
2. That, PR446 wording is amended to reflect the cost of anti-slip testing, and
3. That, Corn Exchange pavement licence renewal to be submitted, and
4. That, the cost of £1,700 for the additional core sample is noted, and
5. That, the cost of update to M365 licenses is noted, and
6. That, the costs of upgrading the Councils IT infrastructure to be added to 2023/24 budget is noted.

F497 **BUDGET PARAMETERS 2023/24, CAPITAL & SPECIAL REVENUE PROJECTS 2023/24 AND BEYOND**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk/RFO, in which she was seeking some guidance in respect of Members expectations so that she could try and calculate as accurate budget as possible.

The Members noted that that the national pay negotiations would result in higher staff costs for the current year than previously budgeted. And that most public services were being pressured to offer double digit % increases.

The Committee asked that RPI was used as a consideration when reviewing the fees and charges for its services – such as Halls, pitches and cemeteries.

Members were pleased to hear that currently the Council is contracted to very competitive rates of energy, however this contract is due to end in March 2023 and if rates have not settled or decreased there would be a significant increase in energy costs. Though some assistance may be available from a government support scheme.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted, and the Town Clerk base her budget calculations as per the discussions.

F498 **YOUTH SERVICES GRANT AWARDS 2022-23**

The Committee considered six applications for funding from the Youth Services Grant funding for 2022 and noted that the grant totals requested totalled £103,573.58, exceeding the £40,000 which was allocated.

The Chair of the Stronger Communities Committee updated Members on what they had heard during public participation at the meeting on 26 September and it was agreed that all the applicants were worthy causes that supported young people in and around the town. However, the award scheme was funded by Witney rate payers and therefore should benefit its residents. A percentage share of the budget had been considered but it was felt that the applicants offering the most pressing and direct services should receive larger amounts, whilst those that had reserves or other funding opportunities should receive less or no award at all.

To that respect the Committee agreed the following distribution:

Got2B CIC	£20,000
Home-start Oxford	£10,000
APCAM	£5,000
Oxfordshire Music & Arts Trust (OxMAT)	£2,500
Parish of Witney	£2,500
Aspire Oxfordshire	No Award

Resolved:

1. That the report be noted and,
2. That the Youth Services Grant totalling £40,000 be distributed as detailed above.

F499 **GRANT CORRESPONDENCE**

The Committee received letters of thanks from OxMAT and Witney Voicebox Choir in relation to recent grant awards and payments.

Resolved:

That, the correspondence be noted.

F500 **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.

F501 **EXTERNAL CONTRACTS & LICENCES**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk/CEO concerning contracts and licences that were approaching renewal.

Members considered the options for Human Resources and Health & Safety support. The Committee discussed the merits of using a new provider who was local and could offer a more bespoke service in respect of these areas.

The Town Clerk updated the Committee that further to her report that the current food vendor at West Witney had advised that he would be removing his van and therefore consideration should be made for a replacement vendor. Members considered the request from Olive's Kitchen who had approached the Council and agreed that we offer a 6-month trial period at an the already agreed rate for this pitch.

Recommended:

1. That, the confidential report of the Town Clerk/CEO be noted and,
2. That, YouHR Consultancy be appointed as the Council's new HR provider and,
3. That, GH Safety be appointed as the Councils new H&S provider and,
4. That, annual renewal of the ModenGov software is agreed and,
5. That Bidwells are appointed on a retained basis as professional property and estate management consultants and,
6. That, Agreement is drawn up with Olive's Kitchen as food vendor at West Witney Sports Ground.

F502 **PROPERTY & LEGAL MATTERS**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk/CEO concerning Property and legal matters.

The Town Clerk advised that due to the withdrawal of the external decorating contractor some of the work had commenced and would be completed by the Councils maintenance operatives.

However, Officers would have to once again go out to tender for the remaining works to be completed in the Spring 2023.

Members were advised that a number of assets due to be transferred to the Town Council from the District Council, were continuing to be delayed for legal reasons.

Members considered the unauthorised use of the lake at the country park by boaters and paddleboarders and that due to the safety issue urgent action was required. It was agreed that the budget set aside for Water Safety/Education could be used to fund safety signage.

The Committee considered the report regarding the Carillon at St Marys Church. It was felt that as there was currently a fundraising effort around the bells, this work wasn't urgent and in fact, given the significant cost, depending on the success of the fundraising funding might be found elsewhere.

Recommended:

1. That, the confidential report of the Town Clerk/CEO be noted and,
2. That, the Park Ranger looks into suitable safety signage for the lake to deter unauthorised boaters and paddleboarders as a matter for urgency and,
3. That, the required non urgent repairs to St Marys Clock are noted.

F503 MAJOR CAPITAL & REVENUE PROJECTS

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk and she was requesting that Members give consideration to the priority of these projects.

The Members considered the three major projects identified in the report and were concerned about the considerable cost of each project. One of these projects' propositions had changed significantly, potentially leaving the Council exposed to a much greater risk. Members felt that the skatepark project needed to be progressed as a standalone project; the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that in fact the contractors had included they could assist with fundraising as part of the brief.

To fund all three projects, it would be necessary for the Council to take out a substantial public works loan. Further information was required as to whether this was affordable given the current economic climate.

Recommended:

1. That, the confidential report is noted and,
2. That, the skate park project be progressed as a standalone project and,
3. That, Officers explore the cost and funding of three project outlined in the report with an update being provided at a future meeting.

F504 CHANGE PROGRAMME - CONFIDENTIAL UPDATE

The Committee received and considered the confidential update from the Town Clerk.

Members were advised that there was a lack of works vehicles for the grounds maintenance team to operate effectively, particularly as one had recently broken down. Plans for electric vehicles had been reviewed and current prices and availability of a suitable vehicle were proving

problematic. Officers were suggesting, as a short-term solution a small second-hand diesel van be purchased, and that the replacement of the flatbed would also need to be diesel.

Members considered options for Emergency call out and agreed that the former system should be reinstated.

Recommend:

1. That, the confidential update be noted and,
2. That, the Council purchases a small second-hand works vehicle with a view to replacing with an electric vehicle in the future and,
3. That, the flatbed lorry be replaced with a diesel van
4. That, the Council's emergency callout system is reinstated and operated on a rota basis.

F505 STAFFING MATTERS

The Committee received and considered the confidential minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee meeting held on 6th September 2022 which had been circulated ahead of the meeting.

The Town Clerk requested that a delegation be agreed in respect of the actions relating to minute S184(1) and recruitment.

The Chair of Personnel Sub-Committee reiterated the confidential nature of the minutes and reminded those present that none of the information should be divulged outside of the Committee.

Resolved:

1. That, the minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee meeting held on 6th September be noted and the recommendations contained therein approved and,
2. That, future decisions under minute S184(1) be delegated to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chair of Personnel Sub-Committee, and the Leader or the Deputy Leader in order to progress matters in a timely manner, if needs be.

The meeting closed at: 7.53 pm

Chair