

Minutes of the

Finance & General Purposes Committee

28th September 2020 at 7.30pm



Councillors attending: J Moody (Chair), P. Siggers (Vice Chair), P Davies, V Haval, M McNeill, A Sandiford, A Thompson

Also present: Guy Langton (Planning & Environment Officer – minutes), Cllr M Khan (non-committee member), Cllr E Hards (non-committee member), Maj. W Thrussell (ACF).

71. To receive apologies.

No member tendered their apologies for the meeting.

72. To receive declarations of interests.

No member declared an interest in any item on the agenda.

73. To agree the Minutes of the meeting held on 24th August 2020

Councillor Moody proposed, Councillor Siggers seconded and it was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes presented as a true and accurate record of the meeting. All members agreed.

74. Questions on the Minutes as to the progress of any item.

The members wished to know the detail of the CCTV cameras that the Council was funding across the town. It was thought that whilst one had been removed, a replacement had been installed elsewhere.

Councillor Moody proposed, Councillor Siggers seconded and it was **RESOLVED** to suspend standing orders to enable Councillor Hards to address the Committee.

Councillor Hards addressed the Committee on the subject of Remembrance Day events. She advised the Committee that the Royal British Legion had instructed branches that they should not be responsible for parades in the future. Reminding the Committee that no parade was planned for 2020 in recognition of the Covid-19 emergency regulations, Cllr Hards requested that the Committee consider the resources that planning and staffing a full parade in the future would have on the Council and allocate resources accordingly.

Councillor Moody proposed, Councillor Siggers seconded and it was **RESOLVED** to return to standing orders and consider agenda item 13 at this point in the meeting.

71. To review the correspondence from British Legion regarding future Remembrance Day events in Didcot and the financial liabilities on the Town Council.

The Committee **agreed** to send a letter to the Royal British Legion (Didcot branch) to thank them for managing the event in the past and that the Council looked forward to working closely with the Legion in the future.

The Committee **agreed** that the Council would plan how to manage the parade in future years.

72. To review two grant applications.

Councillor Sandiford proposed, Councillor McNeil seconded and it was **RESOLVED** to approve the grant request for £150 from Didcot Library. All members agreed.

Councillor Thompson proposed, Councillor Sandiford seconded and it was **RESOLVED** to reject the grant request for £2,500 from the local Army Cadet Force. All members agreed.

73. To note the monthly accounts and payments made in July and August 2020.

Councillor Davies noted that the Council had transferred £20,000 to the Civic Hall current account in July 2020 but that at the end of August 2020 the account balance was approx. £16,500. The accounts presented did not give the detail of which cost centres had been used for this expenditure. The Committee **agreed** that this detail could be made available for future meetings.

The Committee noted that there was more than one PDQ machine being paid for and **agreed** that the necessity of this would be reviewed in the light of the combination of Council and Civic Hall cost centres.

Councillor Haval noted that the cash balances at the end of July 2020 were £1,253,630 and at the end of August 2020 £1,157,122. The Committee recognised that this represented a significant reduction in the cash available.

Councillor Davies proposed, Councillor Moody seconded and it was **RESOLVED** to suspend standing orders to enable Maj. W Thruswell of the ACF to address the Committee. All members agreed.

Councillor Moody welcomed Maj. Thruswell and advised him of the Committee's decision regarding the ACF's grant request.

Councillor Davies elaborated, confirming that the Committee had not been clear as to the benefit to Didcot Town and its residents.

Maj. Thruswell thanked the Committee for their advice, noting that the Cadet Force had been self-supporting in previous years but that the restrictions in place to slow the spread of Cov-id-19 had curtailed the usual fund-raising activities the Cadets could undertake. This was compounded by the hardship some cadet's parents were in and they were having to reluctantly withdraw their children from the Cadet Force being unable to afford the membership costs. The Cadet Force welcomed all young people and the children were accepted in a fair and equitable manner. Maj. Thruswell confirmed that the ACF would review and revise their grant application and would submit it again.

Councillor Moody noted his thanks to Maj. Thrussell for his attendance and looked forward to receiving a revised application.

Councillor Moody proposed, Councillor Siggers seconded and it was **RESOLVED** to return to standing orders and resume consideration of the matters on the agenda. All members agreed.

74. To note the Sales Ledger Aged Account Balances report which went to Civic Hall Management Committee and the considerations therein.

Councillor Moody noted that there were a number of tenacious debtors, that a number had been successfully approached for payment by Council staff but that progress was slow, in part because those with outstanding balances were proving hard to engage.

Councillor Haval noted that some other public bodies were late paying, including the District and County Councils.

Councillor Moody proposed, Councillor Siggers seconded and it was **RESOLVED** to note the aged payments, to recognise the efforts of the Council and other staff in credit control and to continue to seek payment of the debts and review the pursuance of debt through legal means. All members agreed.

75. To take a first look at the budget for 2021-2022.

GL confirmed that the EOY figure referred to the spend at the end of the 2019-20 financial year, the YTD figure was the spend at the end of month 5 2020-21, so represented 5 not 6 months of costs.

Councillor Moody considered the paper was to note at this stage and that it would be looked at as part of the 2021-22 budget process.

76. To review the Extra-ordinary Covid risk assessment relating to staff working at the DTC offices.

The Committee reviewed the risk assessment and considered it a requirement that visitors sign the Covid-19 form or scan the QR code. The fact that the Council did not retain the data electronically meant that the reference to adherence to the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation was unnecessary.

Councillor Moody proposed, Councillor Davies seconded and it was **RESOLVED** to revise the wording at Risk 2 to remove reference to GDPR. All members agreed.

The remainder of the document was noted.

77. To review the quotes for the end of year close-down and partial exemption work

The Committee noted that the Council awaited two further detailed quotes, that all quotes should indicate the qualifications of the auditors and that the auditor appointed could commit to the timescale required by the Council.

Councillor Moody proposed, Councillor Haval seconded and it was **RESOLVED** to postpone the consideration of the item to the next meeting of this Committee. All members agreed.

78. To receive a verbal up-date on the recent flooding of the Civic Hall.

GL reported that a Loss Adjuster had visited the Civic Hall / Council Offices to review the damage and claims. The Loss Adjuster had confirmed that the two occasions of

flood would be dealt with as a single claim. Quotes were outstanding though a number of specialists had attended the building to view the damage and quote for repair.

79. To note the report on the website accessibility regulations.

The Committee recorded its thanks to C Lordan for her clear and detailed report, which highlighted that there remained some actions to be undertaken to maximise the Council's website's accessibility.

Councillor Moody proposed, Councillor Thompson seconded and it was **RESOLVED** to undertake the work required to maximise website accessibility within a reasonable timescale. All members agreed.

80. To note the progress report on items not on this agenda

Re Costings for creating new football pitches at Ladygrove.

Councillor Moody reminded the Committee that it had requested as many pitches to be created as possible and therefore funds may need to be vired to this budget to enable this to happen.

Re Emergency Plan.

Councillor Moody sought clarity on the basis on which Fleet Meadow Community Centre could be used as an emergency response centre.

Re Civic Hall green improvements.

Councillor Moody noted that the Committee would benefit from the inclusion of installation of Solar PV cells, upgrade to LEDs and installation of destratification fans on the progress report. GL gave a brief verbal update on the progress of the Solar PV project. Councillor Moody noted that the Council should be a leader in green matters in the town. Councillor Davies considered the Council could consider the installation of solar power on its other buildings. Councillor Moody agreed, noting that the installation of solar panels, both PV and for hot water could benefit Willowbrook when the lease is renegotiated in 2022.

Councillor Moody proposed, Councillor Davies seconded and it was **RESOLVED** to prioritise the project to install Solar PV cells at the Didcot Civic Hall, to be funded with Section 106 contributions. All members agreed.

81. To consider the delegation authority over £15,000 of budget 1173 (Green Projects) to the Civic Hall Management Committee for the sourcing and installation of new led lighting units, destratification fans and window actuators to expedite work to reduce the carbon footprint of the main hall.

Councillor Davies considered the likely financial benefit should form part of any report on such matters.

Councillor Moody was hopeful grant funding, such as S106 would be forthcoming but considered the matter to be of some urgency and that delegation to the Civic Hall Management Committee would hasten the process.

Councillor Davies proposed, Councillor Haval seconded and it was **RESOLVED** to delegate authority for £15,000 of budget 1173 to the Civic Hall Management Committee. All members agreed.

Councillor Moody proposed, Councillor Siggers seconded and it was **RESOLVED** to consider the following two items in confidential session. All members agreed.

82. To review a paper to develop a detailed purchase and goods receipt process that adheres to our Financial Regulations.

Councillor Moody introduced the item and the attached report. Councillor Haval considered the contents to be suitable for the purpose, though considered it suitable to apply an interest charge to aged debts. Councillor Davies considered that the process may be by-passed if too cumbersome, so should be supported by a clear policy and that any charge levied on aged debts should be explicit.

Councillor Moody proposed, Councillor Siggers seconded and it was **RESOLVED** to approve the recommendations as follows (additions in **bold**):

- Establish an improved purchase order system to cover all DTC purchases and expenditure, **supported by an accompanying policy and procedure**
- Multiple small value purchases should be consolidated as far as possible to reduce administration and possibly benefit from volume discounts
- Room hire bookings will only be accepted when accompanied by full payment. There may be a small number of large commercial hirers that may be invoiced at the discretion of Didcot Town Council. Failure to clear an outstanding account will, after 60 days, trigger suspension of future bookings. **Charges may be levied in pursuance of the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998.**
- The anticipated few invoices that arise from room hire at Didcot Civic Hall, or any other Council-owned or operated buildings or premises, will use the same system as Didcot Town Council. Use of any parallel or duplicating process should cease
- Finance reports to the Finance & General Purposes Committee, the Environment & Climate Committee and the Outdoor Services Manager (and other budget holding staff) must be more contemporaneous to allow budgets to be more easily managed
- A system must be established to properly document authorisation of payments in relation to goods and services purchased by Didcot Town Council
- Contracts may only be authorised by the Finance & General Purposes Committee or Civic Hall Management Committee, as appropriate.

All members agreed.

83. To note several accounting scenarios exploring the impact of the pandemic on the Town Council accounts.

The Committee noted the papers.

Councillor Moody noted that the headline deviation was approx. 10% of the Council's operating costs, which he believed to be manageable within the budget.

Councillor Haval noted that in accounting terms, 'bar sales' could not be less than 'bar costs'.

The meeting closed at 21:07.

Signature: _____ Date: _____