

Didcot Town Council

Finance and General Purposes Committee 23rd November 2020 at 7.30pm Meeting held online at zoom



Note: These minutes are subject to approval as a true and correct record by the next meeting of this Committee.

Present:

Councillor J Moody (Chair)
Councillor P Siggers (Vice Chair)
Councillor P Davies
Councillor V Haval
Councillor M McNeill
Councillor A Sandiford
Councillor A Dearlove (subbing for Cllr A Thompson)

Officer: Mrs J Wheeler, Town Clerk

Also present:

Councillor M Khan (Leader and Deputy Mayor), Cllr Ian Snowden and five members of the public.

102. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr A Thompson.

103. Declarations of interests

Cllr J Moody declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in two grant applications – Mr Hasnet Miah and KADCC. Cllr P Siggers declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in grant applications from HomeStart and KADCC. Cllr A Sandiford declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in Hasnat Miah and KADCC. Cllr V Haval declared an interest in item 14 on the agenda.

Cllr J Moody would facilitate the debate as the Chair but would not take part in the discussion or voting.

104. To approve the Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held 26th October 2020

It was proposed by Councillor J. Moody and seconded by Councillor P Siggers and **RESOLVED** to agree the minutes held on 26th October 2020 as a correct record. On

Minute 101, Cllr P Davies requested that the sentence should delete the reference to "making a profit" and refer to the Council making an "operational surplus". The sentence would read: "Cllr P Davies wondered if the Council wanted to make an operating surplus from the Civic Hall."

Cllr V Haval spoke to amend Minute 87 to read: "Cllr V Haval asked if the Committee agreed in relation to CCTV cameras that whilst one had been removed we were still awaiting one to be installed. "

The following amendment for a future budget report was recommended:
"Budget item 1769: Willowbrook Contract income
Review of the contract which is nearing renewal. A proposal to use the vacant space has been made to F&GP Committee but the Working Group have yet to report back on their work. Refusal to pay in full last year needs to be resolved."

It was RESOLVED that the last three lines would be deleted and the item should read: "Review of the contract which is nearing renewal."

105. Questions on the minutes as to the progress of any item

There were no further questions or comments.

On the proposal from Cllr J Moody and seconded by Cllr P Siggers, it was RESOLVED to suspend Standing Orders to allow the public to speak.

The applicants for a grant all spoke to their applications and the Councillors asked questions during the presentations.

On the proposal of Cllr Moody, seconded by Cllr P Davies, Standing Orders were re-instated.

106. To consider the five grant applications

It was proposed by Cllr P Davies and seconded by Cllr A Dearlove and RESOLVED to award a grant of £500 to the Christmas Day lunches project.

It was proposed by Cllr A Sandiford and seconded by Cllr A Dearlove to award the sum of £10,000 to the Citizen's Advice.

Cllr P Davies wanted this Community Centre to try other grant options such as SODC. Cllr V Haval was concerned about setting a precedent for other similar organisations. The vote was: IN FAVOUR = 0; AGAINST = 2; ABSTENTION = 3. This grant was REFUSED.

It was proposed by Cllr A Dearlove and seconded by Cllr A Sandiford and RESOLVED to award the sum of £1,000 to Homestart.

It was proposed by Cllr P Davies and seconded by Cllr P Siggers and RESOLVED to reserve the sum of £2,500 to Mr Hasnat Miah on the condition that he were set up an independent, charitable body that can receive the grant. It is against the policy to award grant money to a business. It was promised that the Town Council would help him with this task.

107. To review the monthly accounts and payments in October 2020

The Chair paged through the accounts for comments. The detailed profit and loss report (pages 19 and 20) was missing from the pages and will be circulated at the next meeting.

108. To consider the second round of the budget

There was a discussion on the possible opting to tax the Civic Hall building and how this would impact on the finances along with a possible merging of the cost centres. The Town Clerk referred to a paper that sets out the advantages and disadvantages of opting to tax – sent by Parkinson Partnership earlier this year. The income for the Civic Hall was so low that at the moment this would not be the right time to do this. The budget was noted and the Town Clerk offered to circulate this paper again to all Councillors.

109. To consider the merging of cost centres to reflect the new Property and Facilities Committee's responsibilities

The Committee were concerned that merging of the cost centres would make it harder to scrutinise the financial performance. They AGREED that there was merit in breaking down the employment costs into individual cost centres to show the salaries; pension and NI costs. It was AGREED to defer this item until later in the year.

110. To review the quotes for the end of year close down and VAT partial exemption work

This item was deferred from the October meeting. It was proposed by Cllr J Moody and seconded by Cllr P Siggers and RESOLVED to award the partial exemption work to Parkinson Partnership at a cost of £300 + VAT for quarterly calculations.

It was proposed by Cllr J Moody and seconded by Cllr P Siggers and RESOLVED to appoint Rialtus to perform the independent end of year close down reports at a cost of £580 + VAT.

111. To review the quotes for the general and motor insurance

The renewal of both the general insurance and the motor insurance had been delegated to F&GP at the meeting of the Council on 2nd November 2020. The Town Clerk spoke to inform the Committee that the awaited second quote was not competitive and therefore only one option for renewal was available.

It was proposed by Cllr J Moody and seconded by Cllr P Davies and RESOLVED to renew the insurance with WPS at a cost of £10,908.69 plus VAT for the general insurance and the motor insurance at a cost of £2,821.28 plus VAT. It was noted that adjustments will need to be made following receipt of the valuations and the likely need to add contents in for the Willowbrook building. The vote was unanimous.

The Committee decided not to continue with terrorism insurance but asked the Town Clerk to find out more about the cyber insurance and bring this back to the Committee.

Due to the lateness of the hour it was AGREED to defer items 11 and 12 to the next meeting.

112. To note the progress report on items not on the agenda

The progress report was noted. Cllr V Haval wanted to know about when the credit control would be carried out. This would be in early December.

113. Exclusion of the press and public

RESOLVED: pursuant to Section 1 of the Public Bodies [Admission to Meetings] Act 1960 to exclude the press and public from the meeting on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

114. To review the legal advice regarding the Willowbrook Leisure Centre and an awaited proposal

Cllr John Moody up-dated the Committee on the meeting which had been held with Soll/Park Club on the future of Willowbrook Leisure Centre. Initial legal advice had been received from the solicitor on likely scenarios. This was shared with all Councillors. It had recently been confirmed that a new proposal was now being formulated but the Town Council did not yet have these details. It was noted that any proposal is likely to cost the Council quite a lot in terms of outstanding income and loss of rent for the rest of the term of the licence.

115. To consider the potential devolved assets and how to take this forward in terms of funding

The Town Council has been contacted by SODC in relation to the possible opportunity to take on additional land, play areas, buildings and allotment sites within the Didcot boundary. There was concern over the financial liabilities of taking on further assets. Cllr V Haval felt that we should look creatively at the land on offer to see if we can further the aims and objectives of the Council by taking ownership.

It was AGREED that the Town Clerk would draft a letter to be reviewed at the next F&GP meeting expressing interest in the facilities within the Didcot area. The draft of this letter would then go to the Full Council meeting in January for ratification.

The importance of a boundary review was noted when considering the location of the assets and in particular the allotment sites that went across current boundaries.

Meeting closed at 9.50pm.

Signed _____ Chairman Date _____