

Finance and General Purposes Committee
19th August 2019 at 7.30pm
All Saints Room, Civic Hall, Didcot



Minutes

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

Present:

Councillor J Moody (Chairman)
Councillor P Siggers (Vice Chairman)
Councillor A Sandiford
Councillor M Walsh
Councilor V Haval
Councillor M McNeill
Councillor A Thompson

Officer:

Mrs J Wheeler, Town Clerk
Cllr P Davies – public participation only

One member of the public.

49. Apologies

None.

50. Declarations of interests

None.

Standing Orders suspended to allow public participation. (Standing Order 97)

Cllr P Davies spoke about his attempts to amend the minutes from the previous Finance meeting. He felt the minutes to be so brief that they are “meaningless”. He also clarified when Cllr Mallows left the last meeting.

Standing orders were re-instated. Cllr P Davies left the meeting.

51. Minutes of the Finance Committee meeting held 29th July 2019

Cllr V Haval had already circulated amendments to Minute 41 on the Willowbrook vacant space Working Group along with a change to Minute 46 where TRAIN should be RESTORE. These were included in a second version of the Minutes and had been circulated to the Committee prior to the meeting. These were agreed plus two further amendments:

Minute 36: the Grub Hub was operating three times a week rather than two.

Minute 36: Cllr P Davies commented on the recent detail in the F&GP minutes and Cllr Mallows had already left the room before public participation began.

It was proposed by Councillor J Moody; seconded by Councillor A Sandiford:

RESOLVED to agree the minutes held on 29th July 2019 as a correct record with these amendments.

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

Cllr A Thompson asked if there was any up-date on RESTORE. The Town Clerk confirmed that she had not heard back.

Standing Orders suspended to allow discussion (Standing Order 97)

Mr Brian Macnamee addressed the meeting regarding his grant application. He gave an up-date on the work of TRAIN within the Didcot community. They were making great progress; meeting or exceeding their KPI's and were ahead of their business plan. However there were plenty of challenges and it was hard to secure unrestricted funds. They were also now paying £500 per month rent to SODC whereas previously it was peppercorn. The Chair thanked Mr Macnamee for coming to speak.

Standing orders were reinstated.

53. Grant aid applications

The Committee considered two grant aid applications:

- a) **TRAIN**
Application amount £5,000

To help pay for youth work in Didcot. The last grant was two years ago.

Members of the Committee were impressed with the essential work that TRAIN carry out in the community. There was also concern over the actions of SODC to impose the rent. It was proposed by Cllr J Moody; seconded by Cllr P Siggers:

RESOLVED TO grant the sum of £5000.

- b) **Didcot Tea Dances**
Application amount £800

To support the continuation of the tea dances for the residents of Didcot.

It was proposed by Cllr A Thompson; seconded by Cllr M McNeill:

RESOLVED TO grant the sum of £800.

55. Grant aid reports

Reports were NOTED from Citizens Advice and Home Start.

56. Financial statements and budgets as at 31st July 2019

The Town Clerk explained that the Finance Manager had been locked out of the accounts since mid August and it had taken many phone calls; visits to the Bank and completion of forms to resolve the problem. It was therefore not possible to reconcile the balances at this point but she had at last gained access as of today.

The Committee paged through the Income and Expenditure to 31st July 2019.

4027 - Cllr M Walsh commented on the advertising and marketing cost centre which was substantially over-budget. This would be discussed at the next meeting of the Civic Hall Management Committee.

3158 - Cllr V Haval queried the low spend in this cost centre. The Town Clerk explained that the best time to plant trees was either the autumn before the frosts or the spring after the frosts. The cost centre would also cover works to trees.

The Committee **NOTED** the income and expenditure as at 31st July 2019.

57. Cost centres from previous meeting

It was AGREED to raise a query with the Civic Hall Management Committee as to why 4027 was already £1000 over-budget. The cost of the outside bar was also queried by Cllr V Haval – the Town Clerk confirmed that this could be a capital cost. There was a query on the replacement of some of the floor coverings which could also be discussed at the Civic Hall Management Committee.

There was a discussion on the purchase orders system of loose sheets printed and kept in a ring binder. The Town Clerk felt that a consecutively numbered book would be more secure and defines a clear guide of accountability. The Town Clerk was asked to bring a procedure back to the Finance Committee regarding the best way to raise purchase orders.

Overall the F&GP Committee felt that they needed a better understanding of the costs of running the Civic Hall. Cllr V Haval thanked the Officers for the detailed information on the cost centres.

58. To discuss the over-spend in the new Depot build costs

The Town Clerk had prepared an overview of this project based on the detail produced by the Outdoor Services Manager. The successful bid was £497,764 but the budget at that time only had £400,000. Another £50,000 was added at the budget setting in January 2019 but this was not enough to cover the assumed costs of the project.

There were two major delays which contributed to the over-spend – a delay of six weeks at the start to wait for SSE to disconnect the electricity supply. The temporary cabins had been delivered on 1st October and it was not cost-effective to send them back. A large cable which turned out to be obsolete also further delayed the project whilst the cable was tested.

There were a lot of small unforeseen costs which added to the over-spend. The Chair had looked at the file produced by the Outdoor Services Manager and produced a list of questions he wanted answered. It was AGREED to look further at the cost of this project at the next meeting when a response from the Outdoor Services Manager should help answer most of the questions.

59. To appoint a new internal auditor

Didcot Town Council must appoint an independent internal auditor to ensure compliance with The Local Audit (Smaller Authorities) Regulations 2015. The internal auditor spends time assessing the Council's practices and procedures over several visits throughout the year. This report is part of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) which is sent to the external auditor.

SODC had carried out the internal audit for the last two years but have indicated that they no longer wish to supply this service. Three quotes were presented to the Committee:

Company A @ £1,340 based on 3.5 audit days on site.

Company B @ £1300 plus mileage.

Company C @ £1780 based on a maximum of four days a year reducing down to £1,600 and 3.5 days a year.

It was proposed by Cllr M McNeill; seconded by Cllr P Siggers:

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND that Company C is appointed. This would cover both the Civic Hall and the Town Council.

60. To consider paying the annual subscription for the Town Clerk's membership of the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC)

Renewal of this membership had finished at the end of March but not been renewed by the Town Clerk's previous Council. The Town Clerk outlined the advantages of continuing to be a member of this Society. The Clerk's Forum was a valuable source of advice and help. Also the Town Clerk played a role in helping put together Oxfordshire Branch meeting to help Parish Clerks at smaller Councils.

It was proposed by Cllr J Moody; seconded by Cllr M Walsh:

RESOLVED to approve the subscription for the Town Clerk.

The meeting closed at 8.55pm.

Signed _____ Chairman Date _____