

Finance and General Purposes Committee
23rd September 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
Councilor V Haval
Councillor M McNeill
Councillor E Hards (substitute for Cllr M Walsh)

Officer:

Mrs J Wheeler, Town Clerk
Mrs S Hickman, Finance Officer

Two members of the public.

61. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr M Walsh and Cllr A Thompson.

62. Declarations of interests

Cllr A Sandiford declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in item 5 and left the room for this part of the meeting.

63. Minutes of the Finance Committee meeting held 19th August 2019

It was proposed by Councillor P Siggers; seconded by Councillor A Sandiford:

RESOLVED to agree the minutes held on 19th August 2019 as a correct record.

Cllr P Davies had emailed the Town Clerk to request an amendment to the minutes but the email was not seen until the Town Clerk was due to attend the meeting – so

there was no time to circulate. The Chairman took the decision that in addition to the email arriving very close to the meeting – the Councillor wishing to make the amendment to the minutes was not in attendance.

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

Helen Seymour from the 15th Didcot Scout Group spoke about their grant application for monies to replace our electric boiler and water heater. She gave a brief introduction to the 15th Scout Group – the oldest group in Didcot and an overview of their activities with young people in the community. The grant is wanted to provide the scout hut with heating and hot water to help the various scouting groups and also other community groups who make use of the hut. Fund raising has been ongoing but the scouts tend to follow the term time for activities where money can be raised.

Richard Kennell spoke to a report which he had sent evaluating the new services known as the “Grub Hub” initiative. The scheme was to cook three meals every week throughout the summer holidays to feed children who would be missing their free school meals. 590 children were identified from the six most central schools. The bulk of the work was using volunteers recruited from a variety of organisations. The report included a complete break down of the numbers attending along with feedback and evaluation.

This report would be circulated to all members of the Finance Committee at the next meeting. The sum of £2000 had already been approved at the F&GP meeting on 29th July 2019 but this report was now asking for £2,230 to cover equipment and membership costs.

Both speakers were thanked for attending the meeting.

Standing orders were re-instated.

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

Cllr V Haval spoke of an exchange of emails concerning SODC’s property in the Broadway and a community group who is currently renting the property as a short term tenant.

65. Grant aid application

The Committee considered one grant aid application:

- a) **15th Didcot Scout Group**
Application amount £3169

To fund the removal and replacement of an electric boiler and water heater in the Scout Hut.

It was proposed by Cllr P. Siggers; seconded by Cllr V Haval:

RESOLVED TO grant the sum of £3169.

66. Financial statements and budgets as at 31st August 2019

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

Cllr V Haval queried whether the new server would come out of cost centre 1160 – Sharon confirmed that this was just the running costs to date. The server would be a capital spend.

Cllr J Moody – 32525 and 32524 – the sum of £750,000 – this needs to be deleted from the budget as the Council never received the grant. An item would be on the next F&GP agenda.

Cllr J Moody had the following queries:

- 4024 Civic Hall event costs – the budget is £9000 and around half through the year the year to date stands at £9,222.
- 4027 Advertising/marketing – make sure no further advertising is booked.
- 4044 Maintenance contracts - £8,500 – over budget summary of costs would be supplied.

Cllr V Haval wanted to know how credit control was applied and how purchase orders were authorised. Sharon confirmed that outstanding payments were chased but some customers had payment processes where payments always took longer to come through.

67. Draft budget – first round – 2020 - 2021

The papers were the first round of the budget. The Town Clerk had applied a blanket 3% over most cost centres. The Chairman asked the Committee to take away the papers and bring their thoughts to the next meeting. The Environment Committee were already considering their budget cost centres.

The Town Clerk invited Councillors to come back before the meeting so that their ideas could be incorporated.

Cllr V Haval queried the fact that the predicted expenditure was much higher than the income. The Town Clerk explained that the Council does not have a huge amount of income and is therefore reliant on the precept to make up the difference. The precept is calculated on the tax base which is worked out according to the numbers of housing in Didcot. We have to wait for SODC to tell us what the tax base will be before we can finalise our budget. This is generally just before Christmas.

68. To further review the cost of the new Depot

A further report was circulated with the agenda detailing the reasons for the overspend. The Chairman wanted to be clear on the financials with this project.

The contract tendered sum was £497,763.78 but the budget at the time the contract was awarded was just £400,000 – so the project was almost £100,000 over budget from the start. The final sum for the project was £571,156.

The report from the Outdoor Services Manager has answered some of the queries raised in the last meeting. It was also acknowledged that Councillors from the last Council were kept informed of the project although improvements in the up-dates in terms of clear documentation needs to be made.

The Chairman felt that half the overspend seemed to be the supply of the drawings and it was not clear why this was so significant. In his view the contract with the builder seemed to be stacked against the client.

The Chairman stated that given the final sum is around 8-10% of the total contract sum – he reluctantly recommends acceptance. Any challenge would only add to the costs and we would be unlikely to win.

It was noted that there was a lack of paperwork and poor record-keeping which was not acceptable in a major project.

It was AGREED to note the reports and to be extra vigilant with future building projects by ensuring that a robust written record is circulated and kept on file to keep a firm control of expenditure.

69. To consider the quotes for possible replacement of server or putting all files and email in the cloud

The report records the fact that the current server would not be supported after November 2019. Furthermore the operating software – Windows 7 would also not be supported after January 2020. There were three options open to the Council:

- Like for like replacement – with a server.
- A hybrid server and emails stored in the cloud.
- Putting all systems in the cloud – documents and emails. It would be noted that much of our specialist software – such as the Civic Hall booking system; burials and allotment packages and our financial packages are already stored using citrix.

A total of four quotes had been received and most of them were quoting for the option of putting everything in the cloud rather than replacing the server. The Town Clerk had carried out an analysis of the pros and cons for the three options.

If the Councillors opt to replace the server – this will need to be replaced every five years. The cloud technology is well established now and is more like a “pay as you go” – there is no hardware but continuous rental. The other main downside of opting to put everything in the cloud is the risk of a power cut. In Didcot this would only be a very short term problem as there are many large businesses who rely on a constant internet presence in this area.

The Town Clerk also highlighted the issue with the office computers. Most of them are on Windows 7 and need to be up-graded to Windows 10. Many of the computers date back to 2012 and are very slow. The Town Clerk’s computer only has 2mg of memory and often fails to print out legal topic notes from NALC. The same happens with pdfs which often fail to be printed if too large. The risk of not replacing the software is a heightened risk of viruses as the protection will also be lower.

Cllr P Siggers stated that the Council had been through this item a year ago and voted to put everything in the cloud. This decision had not been progressed and the Town Clerk found out by default that the server would not be supported after next month. It had been necessary to get new up-to-date quotes.

Cllr V Haval wanted to check where our information would be stored – whether in the UK or abroad – and how GDPR regulations would be covered.

The Councillors wanted to compare the cost of purchasing a server for the next five years with the cost of going in the cloud – with a purchase of new computers. It was AGREED that three out of the four companies should be invited to go through their quotes at the next meeting.

Of the four total monthly costs; it was agreed to ask the companies who gave the three cheaper quotes to come to present at the next meeting. The Chairman listed some of the things he would want the presentations to cover.

70. Confirmation of current CIL and S106 monies

The report detailing the current sums of CIL and S106 was noted. There was a discussion of projects which the monies could be spent on such as the splash park for Edmonds Park and improved wifi for the Civic Hall with a guest network. The S106 monies needs to be bid for and is not guaranteed to be available. The CIL monies will be sent over to DTC twice a year.

71. Confirmation of receiving the CIL direct into our bank account

It was agreed that DTC would prefer to hold the CIL in our bank account. The next payment would be in October 2019.

72. To consider an early insurance cover renewal

Our current insurance broker had changed cover and was now offering the Council a chance to renew early and enjoy improved cover with the new company. There were no figures offered for early renewal. It was AGREED to see the current contract to the end and go out to tender next year.

The meeting closed at 9.10pm.

Signed _____ Chairman Date _____