

Finance and General Purposes Committee
25th November 2019 at 7.30pm
Northbourne 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
Mrs S Hickman, Finance Manager
Cllr Mocky Khan joined the meeting.
Four members of the public.

Public Participation

Cllr M Khan attended later in the evening.

84. Apologies

No apologies.

85. Declarations of interests

Cllr P Siggers declared that she was a member of the Rotary Club who had donated some money to the Free Christmas Day lunch event.

86. Minutes of the Finance Committee meeting held 21st October 2019

It was proposed by Councillor P Siggers; seconded by Councillor A. Thompson:

RESOLVED to agree the minutes held on 21st October 2019 as a correct record.

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

Cllr Walsh requested an up-date on minute 81 – the Civic Hall VAT query. The Town Clerk informed the Committee that a letter containing VAT calculations over recent years had been sent to HMRC and we were awaiting a response. It was likely to be the first or second week in December before we hear anything.

88. To receive two grant reports from previous recipients

There were two reports – one from Family Fun Maths morning and the other from the Didcot Air Training Corps. These reports were noted.

It was AGREED to suspend Standing Orders to allow the current grant applicants to speak to the Committee.

Presentations were received from Mr Jon Bright of Citizens Advice; Mr John Tabor of Be Free Young Carers and Anna Gatrell of Free Christmas Day lunch event. After questions from Councillors, Standing Orders were re-instated.

89. To consider three grant applications

The Committee discussed the three applications:

It was proposed by Councillor A. Thompson and seconded by Councillor M Walsh to award the sum of £10,000 to Citizens Advice.

It was proposed by Councillor M McNeill and seconded by Councillor A Sandiford to award the sum of £5,500 to Be Free Young Carers.

It was proposed by Councillor A Sandiford and seconded by Councillor M Walsh to award the sum of £500 to Anna Gatrell to help her run her “Free Christmas Day lunch event”.

It was noted by Cllr V Haval that awarding these three grant applications would leave just £2,455 in the budget until the end of March 2020. The Chair said that any future applications would need to be considered with the low funds in mind.

The voting was unanimous for all three applications.

90. To receive the draft budget report for 2020-2021

The Committee were supplied with a budget spreadsheet showing the current year's budget and the actual year to date – along with next year's proposed budget. In addition, the Town Clerk had provided an in-depth report to explain the content of the different cost centres and the end of year sums as at 31st March 2019. The Chairman asked Members for any immediate concerns:

1101 Administration Salaries

Cllr M Walsh wanted further explanation of the staffing budget increase when the decision not to employ a Deputy Town Clerk was supposed to save the Council

money. The Town Clerk responded that the loss of the Deputy Town Clerk from mid August meant that it was necessary to give a small increase in hours to two admin members of staff to help meet the extra workload which – in the main – had been taken on by the Town Clerk at no extra cost to the Council.

We also had a member of staff leaving her post to have a baby – which left an opening to take on the member of the Civic Hall team who had a degree in journalism and could run the mayoral events and help increase our social media activity. This member of staff along with the two admin members of staff have used their additional hours to take over such duties as the Mayor's Secretary; Mayoral Events; cemetery burials and additional receptionist duties.

The Town Council must however continue to pay for maternity leave for the next ten months until the employee returns to work. The budget also includes a general 3% uplift in all the salaries (although we do not know what the national pay deal will be); increases in pension contributions for the employer and incremental rises for those members of staff who have carried out their job to a sufficient standard to merit a rise in their scale under the terms and conditions of the Green Book.

It was noted that the Civic Hall Manager had lost a full time member of his team but he had taken on two people on part time contracts with the aim of reducing his need for casual support staff on reception. It would be necessary to look carefully at what cover we currently have to ensure we have enough staff. Casual staff will still be needed to cover the bar for weddings and events. The Civic Hall is a busy building and is open from 8.00am to 12 midnight – it is necessary to have staff to cover these hours seven days a week depending on bookings. We also need to have a way to cover illness as there are occasions when we do not have enough staff to cover our commitment to the hall bookings.

Some of these changes would have been covered on the Personnel and Administration minutes. The Town Clerk would do a full report for the next meeting – for the Town Council staff; the Civic Hall and the Outdoor staff – cost centres 1101; 3101; 4001.

1243 PCSO Funding

Cllr A Thompson was unsure whether this sum of £18,500 was value for money and whether the PCSO's time was spent in Didcot. The Chairman thought the agreement was up for consideration next year but the Town Clerk thought it was on a rolling contract. It was AGREED to invite the police to attend a Finance meeting to inform the Committee of how Didcot benefits from paying for a PCSO.

1769 Willowbrook contract income

Cllr M Walsh queried how this income was arrived at. The Chair stated that this was laid down in the contract and depended on usage figures. The Town Clerk had asked for a quarterly report on numbers which they were obliged to supply. She hoped to have a report for the December meeting.

1944 Christmas lights

Cllr M Walsh wanted to know why this had increased from last year. It was confirmed that this was a new fixed price contract for three years and that last year was not comparable as there were lots of problems with fixings on the lamp posts which may

have resulted in less money being spent. Sharon Hickman also confirmed that a bill for the electricity comes out towards the end of the financial year.

2187 Summer Fayre

It was AGREED that this should be £4k rather than £9k because the Town Fayre returned some money last year which should be carried over.

3188 Grant Aid Fund

Councillor P Siggers suggested that this should be increased to £45k as we were almost through the current grant aid budget with four months to go. It was noted that the town is getting larger and therefore the need will also rise.

The Chair wanted clarification on the following cost centres:

- 3145 – Machinery costs
- 9034 – lease for Ford Pick up
- 9039 – Ransomes mower
- 9045 - Parkway mower
- 32504 - Nissan Tipper lease
- 325519 – John Deere mower – this is double-entered in the ear-marked reserves and needs to be deleted
- 3383 – query on the cemetery income which has been lowered for next year
- 3185 – Ladygrove Lakes income – the decision was taken at the Environment Committee not to include the £3,000 licence money for fishing
- 32519 – remove this cost centre
- 32597 - £40,000 in the pavilions project to kick start this project.
- 35581 – Grant received £120,000 for the splash park.
- 32587 – CIL and S106 monies – the Town Clerk will check these figures – the CIL money is dependent on the developer's progressing with their development and paying the money over. S106 is not guaranteed and could be spent on other projects.
- 4015 – query on the extra money for the cleaning contract
- 4044 – maintenance costs
- 4046 – IT website with changes for the accessibility compliance – this would affect both websites
- Some Councillors wanted to return to cost centres 3100 and 1075 to clarify how the children's birthdays work; how much money they make and how much the various packages cost
- Councillors also wanted more information on 403 Catering cost centres and how the budget figures were arrived at.
- 90011 - £100,000 for building maintenance fund – this is ear-marked reserves
- 9060 – noticeboard – query on whether these were
- Cllr Walsh queried whether there was a budget for cemetery signage and noticeboard replacement around the town. 9060 was an ear-marked reserve of £900. There was a view that this should be increased to £2k to refresh some of the town noticeboards.

The amended budget would be brought to the December Finance meeting.

Cllr A Thompson left the meeting during the budget item.

91. To consider the spreadsheet analysis for either the replacement of the server or putting all the files and emails in the cloud – and to confirm the placement of the contract

New spread sheets were presented that compared the quotes from the three companies as like-for-like as possible. The sheets gave approximate figures over the next ten years. One of the companies had only quoted for the hybrid server and not the option of full cloud.

It was advised that the Councillors should consider not just the current needs of Didcot Town Council but the future IT needs in ten years' time. Didcot was growing and the Town Council may need to increase its facilities and assets to adapt to the needs of a growing population.

With the hybrid solution – the Town Council would have the cost of maintaining the server and keeping it secure. The cloud would be more flexible and would allow the Town Council to expand over the next ten years. It was difficult to say which solution would be the most cost effective as one of the quotes was more comprehensive than the other two – including hardware costs and encryption which had not been included by the others.

It was RESOLVED unanimously to adopt the cloud solution for all Council documents and emails. It was noted that our specialist software such as the Finance package would remain in the cloud where it has worked perfectly well for many years. The reason this would remain in the cloud was due to the specialist nature of the software which would cost more to use in another cloud set-up.

Two out of the three companies had quoted for the cloud solution. One company had spent around four hours carrying out a site audit and this had resulted in a more comprehensive quote.

It was RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND that the contract is awarded to MFG – who had carried out a site audit and given the more comprehensive quote to cover the needs of Didcot Town Council and the Civic Hall.

92. To note the combined insurance renewal under the terms of the fixed contract for the final year

The Town Council is in a three year contract with WPS insurance broker. The general insurance is reviewed and adjusted every year but will remain at £9,550 unless our assets change throughout the year. The motor insurance changes every year due to changes in staff drivers and vehicles. The renewal sum this year is £2,442.80. These sums were NOTED by the Committee.

93. To approve the application paperwork for a grant to run the Town Fayre in 2020

The application paperwork was considered and a few minor amendments were made. The applicants would be considered at the next meeting of the Finance Committee on 6th December 2019. The potential theme could be “Bringing Didcot

together". Cllr Walsh wanted to bring the funding questions together on the application paperwork.

94. To review the progress of the Willowbrook Vacant Space Working Group

Cllr V Haval gave an up-date to the Committee as to where the Working Group was in terms of solutions and proposals for the space. The Town Clerk confirmed that she had been on a site visit in August to see the whole centre and had received a proposal for Soll/Park to take on the vacant space. This proposal had not been progressed because the Working Group were carrying out their own investigations.

Another meeting had recently been held between the Town Clerk and the Managing Director on another matter. This will be reported back to the Committee at the December Finance meeting.

Some Councillors were concerned at the lack of progress and wished to kick start the process by advertising the vacant space to increase awareness. It was AGREED that the Working Group would consider whether it was necessary to carry out some form of advertising or public consultation. A report would be brought back to the January meeting of the Finance Committee.

The meeting closed at 9.55pm.

Signed _____ Chairman Date _____