

Finance and General Purposes Committee
21st December 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 Macdonald (sub for Cllr A Sandiford)
Councillor A Thompson

Officer: Mrs J Wheeler, Town Clerk
Mr G Langton, Planning and Environment Officer

Also present:

Cllr M Khan (Leader and Deputy Mayor), Cllr E Hards (Mayor) and four members of the public.

116. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr A Sandiford (Cllr A Macdonald subbing)

117. Declarations of interests

There were no declarations of interest.

118. To approve the Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held 23rd November 2020

It was proposed by Cllr J. Moody and seconded by Cllr P Siggers and **RESOLVED** to agree the minutes held on 23rd November 2020 as a correct record.

Cllr V Haval spoke to state although Minute 87 had been amended, Minute 90 from the October meeting did not appear to have been included. The Town Clerk said that the hard copy of the minutes would be amended.

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

There were no further questions or comments.

120. To note a grant report from Didcot Baby Monday

This report was circulated with the agenda and noted by the Councillors.

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.

Standing Orders were re-instated.

121. To consider the four grant applications

It was proposed by Cllr V Haval and seconded by Cllr A Macdonald and RESOLVED to award a grant of £3,750 to the Didcot Rugby Club.

It was proposed by Cllr V Haval and seconded by Cllr P Siggers to award the sum of £500 to the Didcot Foodbank.

It was proposed by Cllr P Davies and seconded by Cllr V Haval and RESOLVED to split this grant application in to two parts. The first application would be for £624 towards the new kitchen improvements. The second application would be for £3,000 towards essential bills.

It was proposed by Cllr P Davies and seconded by Cllr V Haval and RESOLVED to award the sum of £624 to KADCC for kitchen improvements.

It was proposed by Cllr V Haval and seconded by Cllr P Siggers and RESOLVED to award the sum of £3,000 to KADCC for essential bills.

The grant application from Sue Ryder was discussed and the Committee were supportive of the work in the Didcot area. After much discussion, it was proposed by Cllr V Haval and seconded by Cllr J Moody and RESOLVED to award £1000 to the charity but with the conditions that the money must not be used for wages but should be used on palliative care within the Didcot community.

122. To review the monthly accounts and payments up to 30th November 2020

The Chair paged through the accounts for comments and the detail was noted. The income from Willowbrook was shown as invoiced sums due only – the sums had not been received. Cllr V Haval queried the missing information from two cost centres in the Town Clerk's report. This information would be clarified by email once the detail was confirmed by the Outside Services Manager.

123. To review the debtor's report

The detailed sales ledger shows the status of all invoices raised that have become aged debts. The sums outstanding have dropped from £7,363 to £5,704.97 with £1,658 now received. The Committee noted that these figures are based on invoices raised and may not be accurate or may have been resolved. The Town Clerk confirmed that a further £230 had been received this week from an invoice originally raised in April 2019.

124. To consider the final budget proposal for the 2020-2021 financial year

The Chair paged through the budget pages for questions. He observed that the £50 from the Bowls Club needed to be added. The Chair also explained that this year had been exceptional in terms of the damage that the pandemic had wreaked on our income. There were many unknowns for the next financial year and it was important not to over-state the potential income.

The Chair advised that he had removed the ear-marked reserves from the budget for this year, however the projects were still accounted for in the balance sheet. He wanted to carry over any unspent budget from this year to boost the projects in these reserves.

This proposed budget shows the following:

Total budget income: £1,228,606 (including the £50 from the Bowls Club)

Total budget expenditure: £1,386,991

Movement to/from General Reserve -£158,435

This budget was based on the same precept request as last year – currently £1,050,668.

It was proposed by Cllr J Moody and seconded by Cllr P Siggers and RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that this budget is presented to Council in January 2021.

125. To note the 2019 – 2020 audit return

The audit had been received from the external auditor without qualification and without any additional charges for the extra report requested from the Town Clerk. The Committee noted the return and the two comments from the auditor.

126. To review the interim report from the internal auditor

The comprehensive report was reviewed by the Committee and it was noted that there were far fewer actions compared to a year ago. It was noted that the AGAR from the last two financial years needed to be displayed on the DTC website.

127. To consider the telephony quotes – deferred from the November meeting

DTC currently has an out-dated internet provision from BT via OCC. Our “system” has two telephone lines – one for the Civic Hall and the other for the Town Council. OCC has no desire to continue this legacy service which dates back to when the Civic Hall was home to the “One Stop Shop”. The age of the Council’s internet provision therefore is very slow - better lines with faster download and upload speeds are available to access. The more users who connect reduces the speed for everyone – hall users and DTC staff alike. The current phone system is analogue and thus will not be supported in years to come.

Many companies now use a digital, internet based system which is more flexible as the user is no longer tied to the desk. Portable handsets can be plugged into a modem or by accessing a soft phone service on their laptops or via a mobile phone app.

For the telephony, there are two options to consider:

1. A telephony switch which is a physical piece of hardware in the Council offices.
2. A Microsoft Office 365 integrated approach which will be hosted by the provider in the cloud.

For the internet, there are various options but the recommendation is to use the “fibre to premises” GFast line which offers up to 330/50mbps and leased line connections which guarantee speed of 100mbps or 200 mbps. (Our current system gives DTC a broadband line up to 40/10mbps with a typical speed of 36/9mbps – significantly slower.)

The Officer approached five providers of telephony and internet services. Regarding the internet speeds, the Council pays £67.99 per month. The GFast system with significantly faster speeds costs around £50 per month – so an immediate saving. The GFast line would also benefit the improvements in the wifi that the Council made in the Civic Hall earlier this year.

The benefits of the new telephony system was also covered in the Officer’s report – however the Chair felt that it would be better to improve the internet capacity first before considering the investment in new telephony.

It was proposed by Cllr J Moody and seconded by Cllr P Siggers and RESOLVED to expand the internet to GFast for three years at a cost of £660 per annum – Company A on the Officer’s report. The telephony requirements would be considered at a later stage when the Council’s finances were more assured.

128. To review the progress on the solar power project for the Civic Hall and Willowbrook building

The Planning and Environment Officer has been investigating quotes for supply and installation of Solar Panels – and their likely cost/kWh benefits. The lockdowns have delayed this task but quotes are currently being worked on.

The grant scheme circulated by Cllr Rouane seems to be aimed at reducing the carbon impact of heating. The Civic Hall’s primary heat source is gas using relatively modern boilers. We have therefore been advised that the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme would not achieve the £/tonne of CO2 savings to make the scheme eligible for a grant.

There are however other ways where we may be able to achieve carbon savings. It was also commented that our project to change the lighting in the main hall to LED will achieve immediate savings in this part of the building.

129. To review the fire risk assessment for Willowbrook

A comprehensive fire risk assessment was circulated to the Committee. There were some urgent recommendations which the Town Clerk was asked to resolve with the appropriate contractors. Contact would also need to be made with the football club regarding their gas cylinders; electrical testing and possible obstruction of fire exits. The Chair queried whether the fire doors were repairable rather than the cost of a full replacement.

130. To review the next steps on the future of the Willowbrook building

Following the vacation of Soll Park Club – the keys to the building were picked up on Friday 18th December. The Town Clerk circulated a draft plan for consideration although the timings were a guide and would be subject to workloads. The Councillors were keen to issue a public consultation as soon as possible to assure the public that the building would remain a DTC-owned facility.

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

The progress report was noted. Cllr P Davies wanted work to begin on the CCTV camera at Cow Lane Bridge. The Town Clerk would speak to the Police for a report of incidents as a first step.

132. 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.

133. To consider the draft letter regarding 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 taking 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 outside of the Didcot boundary. The Town Clerk drafted a letter expressing interest in the facilities within the Didcot area only. The draft of this letter would 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.

It was proposed by Cllr J Moody and seconded by Cllr P Davies and **RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND** that this letter is sent to SODC following ratification at full Council.

The Town Clerk had received an email regarding new assets at Ladygrove East and it was agreed that the Ladygrove District Councillors – Cllr V Haval and Cllr D Rouane would represent the Town Council in these negotiations.

Meeting closed at 9.20pm.

Signed _____ Chairman Date _____