

POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE OF THE WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL

**Held on Monday 1 December 2014
at 6.15pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall**

Present

Councillor: Mrs J C Baker (Chairman)

Councillors:	A K Beames	A D Harvey
	R F N Curry	J S King
	Mrs B J Churchill (sub for Ms M J C Curry)	T J Morris

Non-Committee member: H B Eaglestone

Officers:	Town Clerk	Facilities Manager
	Responsible Financial Officer	Democratic Services Officer

Also present: 1 member of the public

F547 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received Cllrs M J C Curry and C Holliday.

F548 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest in matters to be discussed at the meeting.

F549 **MINUTES**

- a) **RESOLVED:** that the minutes of the Policy and Finance Committee held on 29 September 2014 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.
- b) There were no matters arising from the minutes.

F550 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Sue Wilson – West Witney Sports & Social Club

She was present to request financial support for the works identified in the Alder King report. This matter had been instigated by the recent electrical issues. Three electricians had been called in and had not been able to identify where the problem was coming from, but a visit from PHS that day had suggested that the problem lay in the three phase electrics being unbalanced.

The Sports and Social Club were asking the Council for £3,000 as an interest free loan to be repaid over three years. There was the probability of obtaining £2,000 from the brewery and Tower Hill Football Club also had some funds, and would approach the other user clubs. This would make up the money required to pay for the electrical works.

In order to obtain more funding, the Sports and Social Club would need a new lease. A member asked if the Council had seen a set of full accounts from the Sports and Social Club. It was confirmed that it had not, although Sue Wilson said that she could obtain these. Another member asked if the Club was aware of its' responsibilities under the lease. Sue Wilson confirmed that it was.

A member asked which of the user clubs would be asked to contribute financially and Ms Wilson replied that nearly all of them would be asked.

It was established that in order to make repairs, the Social Club would be looking for a 30 year lease. The User Clubs were not willing to put up money for something that was not secure.

F551 **PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS**

The Committee received and considered the schedule of the payment of accounts.

RECOMMENDED:

1. That the following schedule of accounts be approved:

Cheques 29334 – 29397 and DD in the sum of £69,915.18 Imprest a/c

Cheques 100969 – 100970 and DD/Standing Orders in the sum of £65,656.98 General a/c

Cheques 29268 – 29333 and DD in the sum of £76,385.69 Imprest a/c

Cheques 100965 – 100968 and DD/Standing Orders in the sum of £552,153.06 General a/c

2. That the bank reconciliations as at 30 September 2014 and 31 October 2014 be noted.

F552 **FINANCIAL REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the financial report of the RFO as circulated prior to the meeting.

A member asked if the Recreation Committee had recommended that money was given to Witney Mills Bowls Club. The RFO replied that it was more a case of offering practical help than financial help.

Another member asked what was happening in regard to the money set aside for a grant finder in respect of the Corn Exchange. The Town Clerk explained the situation with regard to seeking a fundraiser and hoped to be able to bring this information to a future meeting.

Cllr Morris arrived at 6.15pm.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that the report be noted;
2. that the recommendations from the Committees as detailed in the report be agreed.

F553 **DISCRETIONARY GRANT APPLICATIONS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Democratic Services Officer as circulated with the agenda.

With the recent grant of £500 agreed for the Round Table for the Christmas Tree Light Switch On, the current balance available for grants stood at £835.

Cllr T Morris declared an interest in this item as he was a member of the Round Table.

A member noted Witney Mills Bowls Club bank balance. The building in question – for which the grant was requested to repair - was their building although it sat on Town Council land. He did not see why they should be granted any money. The Chairman added that the Club had made it clear at the Recreation Committee meeting that they had money. A member said that the Town Council had no obligation to repair the building.

Members felt that Witney Model and Collectors Club did a great job and noted they had attended the Advent Fair on Sunday.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that the report be noted;
2. that no grant be awarded to Witney Mills Bowls Club
3. that Witney Model and Collectors Club be awarded £300 and that the grant be made under the **Local Government Act 1972. S137-** Power of Local Authorities to incur expenditure for certain purposes not otherwise authorised
4. that a press release be issued advising of grant support given by the Town Council.

F554 **LEYS RECREATION GROUND TENDER REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Facilities Manager. A member congratulated her on the report and tender documents.

The Chairman queried if sheds for changing and a path were really a requirement at the initial start of the project based on the shortfall of funding. The Facilities Manager replied that the path was a requirement for DDA compliance and the Council already had sponsorship for one changing hut. She was confident of getting all required funding.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that the ITT documents be agreed along with the contract style;
2. that the budget snapshot be noted;
3. that the information on future running costs be noted.

F555 **GROUNDS MAINTENANCE REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Facilities Manager. Members thought that the options appraisal was vital.

The Facilities Manager explained that there were items that could be removed in the proposal if required. Any underspend could go into an earmarked account or back into general reserves.

In answer to a Members question the Facilities Manager confirmed the current total spend on the grounds maintenance contract was £324,000. He asked how much a new contract would save. The RFO replied that the options appraisal would help to indicate the possibilities.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that the report be noted;
2. that the options appraisal and shadow bid be commissioned in time for the first meeting of the Grounds Maintenance Working Party;
3. that from the underspend £8,600 is set aside for professional fees;
4. that £15,473 underspend from this year be put back into the general reserves.

F556 **INTERNAL AUDIT 2014/15**

Members received and considered the Internal Audit Report 2014/15 as circulated with the agenda.

RECOMMENDED: that the report be noted.

F557 **REVISED REVENUE BUDGET 2014/15 AND 2015/16**

The Committee received and considered the first draft budget and noted that the tax base figures or the Council Tax Reduction Grant had not yet been received from WODC.

The RFO explained that the idea of the draft budget was to give members an idea of where things stood at this stage. The Committee noted that the report referred to an annual grant of £50,000 to the Corn Exchange. This was discussed and members felt that this gave out the wrong signal and that any charity running the hall might rely on this as funding. It was felt that ideally the hall should be able to break even and not require a grant.

The Town Clerk reminded members that this was a draft budget and it had been thought prudent to include some money for the Corn Exchange, especially as Madley Park Hall had received start up grants. Members commented that it was the concept of an “annual grant” that they were uncomfortable with.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that the report be noted;

2. that the revised budget for 2014/15 as presented as a first draft be considered further by spending committees during the January cycle of meetings;
3. that £50,000 is allocated to the Corn Exchange for 2015/2016;
4. that the principle of capping the precept at 2% continues;
5. that prior to the next meeting of the Policy & Finance Committee the Finance & Budget Working Party meet in order to further scrutinise the final position before setting the budget.

F558 INVESTMENTS – CCLA LOCAL AUTHORITIES PROPERTY FUND

The Committee had previously received a presentation from Mark Davies of CCLA on investment options. The Town Council had a commuted sum of £69,000 which could not be spent, although any interest accrued could be drawn down. It was suggested that this money was invested with CCLA which could offer a 4 – 5% return.

RECOMMENDED: that the Council invests the £69,000 of commuted funds in the CCLA – Local Authorities Property Fund with the aim of a minimum term of 5 years. The Town Clerk was asked to double check if this sum could be spent at any time.

F559 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That in accordance with section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (admissions to meetings) Act 1960, and as extended by Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public, including the press, be excluded from the meeting because of the confidential nature of the confidential nature of the following business to be transacted.

F560 WEST WITNEY SPORTS AND SOCIAL CLUB

Members considered two issues:

1. The proposal from West Witney Sports and Social Club as explained by Sue Wilson earlier that evening;
2. The temporary changing room solution referred from the Recreation Committee with a report from the Council's solicitor.

Members agreed that the buildings were in a very bad state and that the Council could not enter into a 30 year lease when it did not know if the facility would still exist then. One member felt that the Council should take the opportunity to sort out the situation, but the important thing was to decide what should be done with the building. He felt that neither a 30 year lease nor a £3,000 loan should be given to the Sports and Social Club. Another member commented that the Council should be looking to move the facility, as there were no opportunities for expansion.

The Facilities Manager pointed out that the situation the Council found itself in as landlord with the tenants not fulfilling their obligations. She also highlighted that the Club had based its costings on a report that was 2 years old and therefore prices would have increased. If the Club spent money on the building, the Council would have to spend money on it too. She reminded members that legally the Council had no obligation to provide any temporary

arrangements if the building was closed on health and safety grounds. However, the Committee may feel that there was a moral obligation.

There followed an in depth discussion of the options available. The Facilities Manager gave her professional opinion based on compliance and health and safety issues; however she advised that the Council may wish to consider, on moral grounds, the installation of a temporary facility, or an interest free loan, or lowering the ground rent.

RECOMMENDED: that the building be closed as soon as possible on health and safety grounds and that the Council enters into discussions on providing a loan for the installation of temporary facilities – subject to legal advice being sought.

6 members voted for this recommendation with 1 member abstaining.

F561 **TOWN CENTRE CCTV SCHEME**

The Town Clerk reported that she had attended a meeting of the CCTV Management Committee. Thames Valley Police had given a presentation during which it was explained that they needed to save £400,000. To facilitate this, it was proposed to review the location of the local CCTV management suites. This had caused concern amongst the stakeholders. The Town Clerk added that it may be possible that more money would be needed to retain local monitoring which may have an impact on the Town Council's budgets.

A member reported that WODC had expressed concerns against this in the strongest terms. The members were concerned with this news.

RECOMMENDED: that the verbal report of the Town Clerk be noted.

F562 **STAFFING MATTERS**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the Personnel Sub Committee held on 20 November 2014.

The Chairman wished to correct recommendation 2, by deleting the second sentence and replacing it with 'All other terms would be in accordance with the letter and attachments from the Town Clerk dated 24 September 2014'.

RECOMMENDED: that the minutes, with the above amendment, and recommendations contained therein be noted.

The meeting closed at 7.45pm.

Chairman.