

**FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE OF THE WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

**Held on Monday 17 March 2014**

**At 6pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall**

**Present:**

Councillor J C Baker (Chairman)

Councillors: Cllr A K Beames  
Cllr B J Churchill (sub for Cllr C K Woodward)  
Cllr P J Dorward  
Cllr H B Eaglestone  
Cllr A D Harvey  
Cllr C Holliday (sub for Cllr B J Woodruff)

Non-Committee Member: Cllr D Enright (for part of the meeting)

Officers: Town Clerk Democratic Services Officer

Also present: 1 member of the press

**F135 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for their absence were received from Councillors T J Morris, B J Woodruff and C K Woodward, and the Chairman Cllr P Dorward had advised he would be late. This being the case Cllr J Baker was elected as the Chairman in his absence.

**F136 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllr Baker declared a non pecuniary interest in agenda item 12 – Property and Land Holdings.

**MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** that the minutes of the meeting held on 21 January and 27 January 2014 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**F137 MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising from the minutes of 21 January 2014 or 27 January 2014 to be discussed at the meeting.

**F138 PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS**

The Committee received and considered the schedule of the accounts paid for January and February. Cllr Harvey queried if the childcare vouchers were a staff scheme and the Town Clerk confirmed it was which had been agreed by the Personnel Sub-Committee last year.

In response to Cllr Harvey's question the Town Clerk confirmed that Grundon handled the Council's non-recyclable commercial waste on a contract. She was aware that the Facilities Manager had renewed it a while ago after doing a comparison. Cllr Harvey explained that

West Oxfordshire District Council were logistically nearer and could be cheaper, as it had tried to become more competitive recently.

The Town Clerk informed the Committee that the internal auditor had signed off the bank statements and reconciliations.

Cllr Harvey noted that a payment had been made to Premier Inn. The Town Clerk explained that this was a return for a deposit held for an event in the Langdale Hall.

**RECOMMENDED:**

1. that the following schedule of accounts be approved:

|   |            |             |
|---|------------|-------------|
| Cheques 28864 – 28900 & DD/BACS in the sum of             | £56,349.97 | Imprest a/c |
| Cheques 100939/40 DD & standing orders in the sum of      | £46,806.28 | General a/c |
| Cheques 100941/944-& DD/BACS in the sum of                | £56,220.14 | General a/c |
| Cheques 28901/958 DD/BACS & standing orders in the sum of | £72,882.14 | Imprest a/c |

2. that the bank reconciliations as at 31 January 2014 and 28 February 2014 be noted.

**F139 FINANCIAL REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk/RFO as circulated with the agenda. Cllr Baker noted that the information was up to 31 January and not up to the date of today's meeting.

The Town Clerk explained that the summary income and expenditure had been prepared following the discussion at the last meeting and now summarised each cost centre. The budgeted figures did not include recharges so the figures were not as accurate as she would have liked.

Cllr Harvey queried cost centre 305 – allotments. The Town Clerk informed the Committee that there was an earmarked reserve to cover the ongoing maintenance and improvements. The allotment lease was for 7 years but she recalled that in year 6 a lot of tree work would be needed to be carried out. Cllr Harvey suggested that the rent could be looked at at this point. The Town Clerk said that she had asked the allotment association for an update but had not yet had a response.

The Town Clerk drew members' attention to the financial implications made by the Leisure and Recreation Committee's proposal for works at Tower Hill Cemetery. The Committee had been circulated with a confidential paper showing contractors revised prices for the works to the paths and roads. Contractor D was the cheapest by some way and the Works Contracts Supervisor had confirmed that this specification was the highest. The Town Clerk asked the Committee if it would delegate the decision on which tender to accept to officers so that the matter could progress.

Cllr Harvey proposed this and all members agreed.

The Town Clerk also drew members' attention to the renewal of the insurance premium which was due on 1 April 2014. She said that she would opt for the cheapest premium and that Zurich's looked competitive at this stage. She had asked for one year and three year contract quotes. She was still awaiting the quote from WPS.

Cllr Harvey proposed delegating this to the Town Clerk and all members agreed.

The Committee had also been circulated with a Medium Term Financial Strategy. The Town Clerk was mindful that the Council needed to make savings and she hoped that once she had a full complement of staff, she would be able to carry out a review of services to see where money could be saved.

Cllr Harvey said that he had been involved in best value both at Town at the District Council and he would be happy to offer his services. The Town Clerk recalled that previously there had been a working party and members thought it might be a good idea to reconvene this.

Cllr Baker said that the report was slightly skewed once again, although the Town Clerk said that the bottom line remained the same.

Cllr Eaglestone asked if the Town Council would receive any further money from government as more services were being transferred over to District and Town/Parish Councils. Cllr Harvey replied that the District Councils used to get the Rate Support Grant which had been replaced by the New Homes Bonus money. The Town Council would not receive anything extra. The Town Clerk reported that there was no certainty that the Town Council would get anything from the Council Tax Support Grant next year. She had reduced the amount in the figures but there was no guarantee of anything at all.

**RECOMMENDED:**

1. that the report be noted.
2. that the awarding of the contract based on the revised quotes in respect of works to the Tower Hill Cemetery roads and paths be delegated to officers and the funding for the project be agreed.
3. that the delegation to the Town Clerk to negotiate the Council's insurance premium renewal be agreed.

F140 **CALENDAR OF MEETINGS**

The Committee received and considered a calendar of meeting for 2014/15.

The Town Clerk explained that the Planning and Development committee meetings were 3 weekly – based on the current calendar this meant that a meeting fell on 23 December 2014. She wondered if Members would want to reschedule this.

The Town Clerk pointed out that the Leisure and Recreation Committee had been split into two committees – Amenities and Recreation due to its heavy work load. Finance and General Purposes had reverted back to being Policy and Finance as this was more appropriate.

Cllr Churchill asked if this would be put on the website once it had been ratified and the Town Clerk confirmed that it would. Cllr Eaglestone asked if the Amenities and Recreation committees would have the same chairman. The Town Clerk replied that this was up to the Council to decide.

**RECOMMENDED:** that the calendar of meetings be approved as circulated subject to the Planning and Development meeting of 23 December 2014 being rescheduled.

F150 **INTERNAL AUDIT**

He Committee received and considered the report of the independent Internal Auditor as circulated with the agenda. Cllr Harvey offered his congratulations to the Town Council Officers on a job well done. The Town Clerk explained that there was a small surplus in the petty cash, having taking it over from a former member of staff and tried to reconcile it. She advised that the surplus would be banked to ensure that things were brought back to an even keel.

Cllr Harvey remarked that he didn't think that the amount was an enormous sum given the size of the Council's finances.

The Town Clerk explained that she had provided members with the programme of the internal audit. The contract with the current auditor expired this year and she would be looking to retender or renew it. The current company rotated internal auditors so there was no complacency.

**RECOMMENDED:** that the report of internal auditor be noted.

F151 **CORPORATE RISK ASSESSMENT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk as circulated with the agenda. The Town Clerk advised that the Corporate Risk Assessment needed to be considered before 31 March, and this was why she had called an extraordinary Council meeting to follow the current meeting. She explained that certain risks were acceptable and could not be reduced whilst some could be addressed.

Cllr Churchill asked if the Council was still looking at disabled access to the Town Hall. The Town Clerk replied that the Disability Discrimination Act said that with regard to listed buildings, reasonable steps had to be taken to make it accessible. The Council had put in an intercom system and used to have an arrangement whereby the Corn Exchange was used if a disabled person wished to attend a meeting. Unfortunately the Corn Exchange was currently closed and there was a regular booking on Monday evenings in the Langdale Hall.

Cllr Churchill wondered if a stair lift could be installed for one of the upstairs meeting rooms in the Langdale Hall. The Town Clerk reminded members that the Council was looking to sell the hall. Cllr Churchill still felt this should be looked into.

Cllr Harvey noted that the main theme of the risk assessment was vandalism. He noted the fly posing and said that the law had changed five years ago so that the beneficiary of a fly poster could be prosecuted. If there were continuing problems, he asked that they were brought to the attention of the Environment Portfolio Holder at the District Council.

**RECOMMENDED:** that the corporate risk assessment be noted and approved.

F152 **TOWN CENTRE FORUM MINUTES**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the Town Centre Forum as circulated with the agenda. The Committee noted that the meeting had been not been quorate. Cllr Harvey thought that the Town Centre Forum should be reviewed, and reminded Members of the reason it had been formed originally. He felt that it was now time to move on and perhaps the Town Centre Forum should be run by the Chamber of Trade. Cllr Baker said that the Town Council currently only did the admin for the meetings. Cllr Harvey said that he had no objection to the group using the Council Chamber but the meetings caused a lot of work for Council officers.

**RECOMMENDED:** that on the next agenda for the Town Centre Forum an item was included on changing the Forum to the administration of the Chamber of Trade.

*Cllr Dorward entered at 6.35pm and took the Chair for the rest of the meeting.*

F153 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

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 following business to be transacted.

The Town Clerk explained to the member of the press present that the next items (12 and 13) were commercially sensitive concerning a lease and the appointment of an agent and staffing matters.

F154 **PROPERTY AND LAND HOLDINGS**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk. It was explained that the Council now had a property terrier set up which could be accessed on-line. It was not yet completed.

The Committee discussed land issues at Madley Park which was still under negotiation, the Teen Zone – also at Madley Park, Unterhaching Park and Raleigh Crescent. The Committee also had a discussion concerning the sale of the Langdale Hall and the appointment of an agent.

There was also a brief discussion about the tenancy of the Cemetery Lodge at Tower Hill Cemetery. Discussions were still on-going between the Town Council's agent and the tenants.

**RECOMMENDED:**

1. that the Town Clerk's report be noted
2. that the Committee agrees to the eventual transfer of the Teen Zone on Madley Park Estate
3. that the Committee agrees to the surrender of the lease for the play area on Raleigh Crescent however the Town Clerk explores the freehold transfer of this and the basket ball area rather than the proposed 25 year lease on a pepper corn rent

4. that the preferred agent as identified by the Public Halls Committee be appointed in respect of the freehold sale of Langdale Hall.

*Cllr Enright arrived at 7.04pm.*

F155 **STAFFING MATTERS**

The Committee received and considered the Minutes of the Sub Committee of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 24 February 2014.

**RESOLVED:** that the minutes of the meeting held on 24 February 2014 be noted and the recommendations contained therein agreed.

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The meeting closed at 7.10pm.

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Chair.