



MINUTES OF THE FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
MEETING TUESDAY 15th MARCH 2022 AT THE OFFICES OF
BIGGLESWADE TOWN COUNCIL, THE OLD COURT HOUSE,
4 SAFFRON ROAD, BIGGLESWADE COMMENCING AT 7:00PM



PRESENT:

Cllr R. Pullinger (Chair)
Cllr G. Fage
Cllr M. Knight
Cllr M. Russell
Cllr D. Strachan (virtually)

Mr P. Tarrant –Town Clerk & Chief Executive, Biggleswade Town Council (virtually)
Mr K. Hosseini – Head of Governance & Strategic Partnerships, Biggleswade Town Council
Mrs S. Solomon – Head of Finance & Planning, Biggleswade Town Council
Mr J. Nyamfukudza – Finance Manager, Biggleswade Town Council
Ms. H. Calvert – Administration & HR Manager (virtually)
Mr I. Lord – Place Shaping Manager, Biggleswade Town Council
Mrs S. van der Merwe – Professional Assistant, Biggleswade Town Council
Miss S. Jolly – Senior Administrator, Biggleswade Town Council

Members of the Public – 1

Meeting Formalities:

Following a reminder to meeting attendees, both panel and public, that this is a formal meeting, the Chairman advised that members of the public will be given an opportunity to speak during public open session but not at other times. The meeting is being filmed and by being present attendees are deemed to have agreed be filmed and to the use of those images and sound recordings. The Chairman advised that attendees should not disclose any personal information of individuals as this would infringe the Data Protection Rights of the individual. The Chairman asked everyone to mute their microphones when not speaking.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr M. North
Cllr D. Albone
Cllr I. Bond
Cllr H. Ramsey

ABSENT WITHOUT APOLOGIES

None.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

a. Disclosable Pecuniary interests in any agenda item

None.

b. **Disclosable Non-pecuniary interests in any agenda item**

None.

3. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

None.

4. **PUBLIC OPEN SESSION**

No member of the public wished to speak.

5. **INVITED SPEAKER**

None.

6. **MEMBERS' QUESTIONS**

None.

7. **MINUTES OF MEETINGS**

Members received the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes meeting held on **Tuesday 18th January 2021**.

Item 6.c. – The Orchard Centre. The item which reads 'It was **RESOLVED** that Officers draft a clear policy relating to the “Standard” and “Community Activity” definitions' to be amended to read 'It was **RESOLVED** that Officers draft a clear policy for the Orchard Centre including definitions of the “Standard” and “Community Activity.”

Subject to the above correction, the Minutes were **APPROVED** as a true and accurate reflection of discussions.

8. **MATTERS ARISING**

None.

9. **ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION**

a. **Cost Reduction & Efficiency Review**

Members received the report from the Head of Finance & Planning.

It was **RESOLVED** to consider the report under the Exempt section of this meeting.

b. **Review of Financial Regulations**

Members received and considered a report from the Head of Place Shaping & Town Centre Management, presented in his absence by Mr J. Nyamfukudza, Finance Manager.

Members requested that ambiguity be removed from the text by amending:

'Only the Town Clerk & Chief Executive will be permitted to be issued with a Debit Card'

to read: ' Only the Town Clerk will be permitted to be issued with a Debit Card'.

Members asked that the text:

'6.18 A pre-paid debit card may be issued to employees with varying limits. These limits will be set by the Finance & General Purposes Committee. Transactions and purchases made will be reported to the Council. and authority for topping-up shall be at the discretion of the Council or relevant committee.'

be amended to read:

'6.18 A pre-paid debit card may be issued to employees with varying limits. These limits will be set by the Finance & General Purposes Committee. Transactions and purchases made will be reported to the Council.'

Subject to the above corrections, it was **RESOLVED** to adopt the procedures as outlined in this report.

c. **Risk Assessment – 2021/22**

Members received and considered a report from the Head of Place Shaping & Town Centre Management, presented in his absence by Mrs S. Solomon, Head of Finance & Planning.

Members raised the following points:

The importance of the risk management scheme was stressed when assessing projects taking place in the Town.

A request was made that a compare and contrast exercise be included at any future review to highlight changes.

A Member requested the inclusion of risk management in case of war.

It was **RESOLVED** to adopt the risk management scheme as outlined in this report.

10. **ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

a. **Capital Income Optimisation**

The report was noted.

b. **Finance Review Update**

The Head of Finance & Planning delivered an oral update on progress connected to the implementation of the Finance Review.

In summary:

The adopted recommendations had been broken down into six quarterly deliverables timelines. Work has commenced on those with a deadline of 31st March 2022.

Finance staffing had increased to enable efficient structures and reporting and to enable the implementation of revised financial processes.

Negotiations are in progress with the current finance software provider to adopt additional software modules to manage and report income received from bookings and other income streams. Costs to be presented and reviewed by the Town Council with the aim of implementation by 1st April 2022.

A review of payroll structure and reporting processes had been undertaken. The Administration & HR Manager had documented the reporting process and the staff payroll system had been reviewed to ensure efficient recording. A new HR system will be implemented from 1st April 2022 to encompass improvements.

The process for the collection of fees was under review, including the possibility of cashless payments. Communications with the public and marketing would make any changes smoother. Contributions by Members towards communications and marketing were welcomed. A detailed report would be presented to the Committee at the next meeting.

Members asked that timelines be circulated for visibility.

Members and Officers requested a detailed report to include the sequencing of recommendations, timelines, risk, cost, and implementation of recommendations.

Members recalled a Town Council decision not to rule out cash transactions because of their significance. A cash option needed to be available.

The report was **NOTED**.

c. **Asset Register**

Members received an oral update from Mr K Hosseini regarding work on the Town Council's Asset Register project.

Initial scoping of the regional market had taken place prior to engaging chartered surveying services.

Historical records had been shared by a local firm and engagement was underway to link this information with the Asset Register.

Documentation had been requested from H M Land Registry, payment had been made, and a full response was awaited.

Research into the local market had identified six RICS chartered surveyors who had been approached with an expression of interest. Two responses had been received from interested firms.

A meeting had been arranged with a potential supplier to discuss available services, costs, etc.

Members discussed the delivery to the Town Council of a full report, identifying all work, timelines, priorities, and manpower involved.

It was **RESOLVED** that a full report would be delivered to this committee on 21st June 2022.

d. **BTC Website**

Members received and considered a written report from the Administration & HR Manager providing an update on the completion of work on the Biggleswade Town Council website.

The report detailed work completed to date and scheduled.

Members expressed their thanks for work completed to date. Members suggested that analytics would identify traffic and popular pages, enabling a focus on areas attracting the most attention. Analytics might affect types of information published, elements of structure, and search engine optimisation and should be considered prior to further investment.

In response to a Member's enquiry, the Administration & HR Manager confirmed that the cost of remaining work would be included in the current contract, with an ongoing monthly charge thereafter for support.

Members stressed the importance of accuracy of data on the website.

The report stated that a new layout was required for the top of each page. Members hoped this would be small in size and would not detract from page content.

A calendar for rooms at the Orchard Centre should not show details of commercial bookings.

Members asked that the development of online booking for market stalls be paused whilst the long-term process for market stall bookings is established.

It was thought that the website content needed to be simplified and made more attractive, and that some content needed to be brought up to date.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Administration & HR Manager would liaise with the provider to produce a further report addressing the above items.

The report was **NOTED**.

11. **PUBLIC OPEN SESSION**

No members of the public wished to speak.

12. **EXEMPT ITEMS**

13.a. Car Parking Tender

13.b. Cost Reduction & Efficiency Review

13. EXEMPT ITEMS

- a. Members discussed the car parking tender.
- b. Members discussed the Cost Reduction & Efficiency Review. The outcome of the Asset Register Review and Contracts review will be considered at the next committee meeting on 21st June 2022.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- 1. the £4,000 saving associated with a critique of non-payroll related vote headings be cashed.
- 2. the £3,054 saving associated with a review of VOIP be earmarked as a potential saving.
- 3. the old depot be rented out in the short term pending further development.
- 4. the Council actively draw down S106 monies where relevant and continue negotiations with Central Bedfordshire Council connected to broader place shaping opportunities.
- 5. the Council actively conclude negotiations around Linear Wood and Pocket Park prior to bringing a report to Council for consideration.
- 6. the Council actively conclude negotiations around Apollo Gardens and other playgrounds prior to bringing a report to Council for consideration.

The meeting was closed at 21:05 pm.