



**MINUTES OF THE FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
MEETING ON TUESDAY 17th JANUARY 2023 AT THE OFFICES OF
BIGGLESWADE TOWN COUNCIL, THE OLD COURT HOUSE,4
SAFFRON ROAD, BIGGLESWADE COMMENCING AT 7.00PM**



PRESENT:

Cllr R Pullinger (Chairman)
Cllr M Foster (Deputy Chairman)
Cllr I Bond
Cllr G Fage
Cllr M Knight
Cllr M North
Cllr H Ramsay
Cllr M Russell
Cllr D Strachan

Mr P Tarrant – Town Clerk & Chief Executive
Mr K Hosseini – Head of Governance & Strategic Partnerships
Mr R Young – Finance Manager
Mr I Lord – Place Shaping Manager
Ms S Van der Merwe – Deputy Administration & HR Manager
Mr K Kareem – Assistant Accountant
Ms F Gumush – Meetings Administrator

Members of the Public – 9

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 D Albone.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

a. Disclosable Pecuniary interests in any agenda item:

Cllr G Fage for Parking Fees under Item 9c.

b. Non-Pecuniary interests in any agenda item:

None.

3. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

a. **Korede Kareem**

The Chairman welcomed Korede Kareem, Assistant Account, who is a recently appointed member of staff to the Town Council.

The Chairman also announced that he would be making a slight change in the order of the agenda by bringing Item 9C, Annual Fees Review, to the top of the agenda as it will have an impact on the item concerning the general precept for next year.

4. **PUBLIC OPEN SESSION**

There were two members of the public who wished to speak at the meeting.

Gavin Day, Biggleswade

Mr Day commented on Item 9a, the Precept Determination 2023/2024, and noted that the precept was to increase by 9.95% and believed that over the four years of the Council, the increase was close to 46%.

Mr Day went on to add that in the current climate, he believed an increase of 35p a week was unaffordable and suggested that the Council review the numbers again.

Dave Hindle, Biggleswade

Mr Hindle, who was attending as one of the grant applicants, Bigg Welcome, thanked the Council, and shared that he would be more than happy to provide further information on the work that Bigg Welcome completes.

5. **INVITED SPEAKER**

No guest speaker was invited.

6. **MEMBERS' QUESTIONS**

None.

7. **MINUTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF MEETINGS**

Members indicated that Item 10d, Credit Control Policy, the minutes should read 'It was RESOLVED to recommend this report to Council'.

Subject to these amendments the Minutes were **APPROVED** as an accurate record of the Town Council Meeting held on 29th November 2022.

8. **MATTERS ARISING**

None.

9. **ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION**

a. **Annual Fee Review**

The Finance Manager updated Members that a change was made on page 24 of the Agenda Pack to remove the discount for pensioners, students, benefits claimants as this was the resolution of the Town Council on 26th July 2022.

The Committee reviewed each fee individually.

i. **Scale of Charges for Market Stall Rents Etc**

Members noted that the rates of market stalls had remained the same since pre-Covid times despite the growth in demand. It was suggested that a change in policy could be implemented to allow new traders time to grow their business before being charged full rates.

Members **RESOLVED** to adopt the charges for Market stall rents as set out, with the exception of the rate for charitable/voluntary organisations that support Biggleswade, which should be aligned with other stalls at £17.

The Chair clarified that charitable voluntary organisations, which support Biggleswade, are charged a returnable deposit and not a fee.

ii. **Scale of Charges for Allotment Holders**

The fees for 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 are for information purposes as they have already been agreed. Fees for 2024/25 will be reviewed future in November consistent with previous practice.

Members **NOTED** the report.

iii. **Drove Road and Stratton Way Burial Grounds Fees**

Members commented on the fees for burials and pointed out that taking into account the budget there was potential for burial fees to be slightly higher. Members comparing fees to other Council's noted that a bigger increase in fees would be more beneficial.

Members asked if a variance of 5% was made what impact would this have to the revenue. The Finance Manager responded that the impact would be a £3000 increase per 5%.

It was **RESOLVED** to implement an increase of 15% on all burial fees.

iv. **Scale of Charges for Orchard Community Centre**

Members commented on the use of the Orchard Community Centre and noted that the Centre was not yet at full capacity and increasing fees could result in a loss of custom.

Members suggested further marketing of the facilities could help to increase usage.

Members **RESOLVED** to adopt the charges as laid out.

v. **Scale of Charges for Hiring of Sports Facilities**

The Town Clerk & Chief Executive pointed out that there was now an online booking system for ease of use for the football pitches.

Members asked whether there was a policy for teams outside of Biggleswade to be charged slightly higher fees than compared to local teams and it was confirmed that this was not the case but that it would be looked at when putting together the next budget.

Members **RESOLVED** to adopt the charges as laid out.

vi. **Scale of Charges for Parking Permits**

Members **RESOLVED** to adopt the charges as laid out.

b. **Original Estimate & Precept 2023/2024**

The Town Clerk & Chief Executive summarised some changes made to the report and noted that this paper supplemented the paper submitted to the Finance and General Purposes Committee on 29th November 2022.

The new paper included the additional information requested by Members, namely the 22/23 indicative projected outturn and the main drivers impacting upon any increased precept.

Members commented on the report and noted that the rates for the Council depot had increased from £16,000 to £28,000 and asked if this could be clarified at the next Council meeting.

Members noted that a considerable proportion of the budget relates to staff pay which is driven by the NJC national pay settlement.

Members **RESOLVED** to ask Officers to update the precept calculations based on their observations for the Town Council Meeting scheduled for Tuesday 24th January 2023.

Members also **RESOLVED** to recommend to Council Option 2 budget with the following amendments:

- Remove upgrades to the white fleet, removing £24,000.
- Reduce ICT budget by at least £3,000 and then go to tender.
- Reflect any changes made to fees and charges made during the F&GP Committee meeting.
- This should be presented to council in a form that shows this year's budget, projected outturn and next year's budget and explain any variances.

c. **Grants Process 2022/2023**

Members asked for clarification regarding the policy of grants whereby if an applicant has applied in the first tranche of the process, whether they are not eligible to apply in the second tranche.

The Chairmain clarified that currently there is nothing in the Council policy to this effect.

The table below shows the amounts awarded to grant applicants.

APPLICANT	AMOUNT REQUESTED	AMOUNT AWARDED
Biggleswade Community Carnival	£1,189	£500
Biggleswade Good Neighbours	£500	£250
Biggleswade Sea Cadets	£1,500	£1,000
Carers in Beds	£600	£600
Biggles FM	£1,850	£1,850
For Men To Talk Community Interest Group*	£500	£500
East Beds Community Bus Ltd (Ivel Sprinter)	£750	£250
Keech Hospice	£1,000	£1,000
Royal British Legion – Biggleswade Branch	£750	£750
Biggleswade Community Group	£2,000	£1,500
Hear2Listen	£1,000	£1,000
Bigg Welcome	£2,000	£1,500
Biggleswade Community Garden	£1,500	£500

* As no accounts had been presented with the application from For Men to Talk, the grant was awarded on the condition of receipt and review of these accounts by Officers.

Cllr Bond raised a concern that there was no application from Biggleswade History Society listed for consideration, as he was assured this was delivered by hand before the deadline. The Clerk and Chairman advise Cllr Bond that this would be investigated, and if necessary, the application will be brought to the next F&GP meeting for consideration on its merits (regardless of budget remaining).

d. **Orchard Centre Policy and Terms & Conditions**

Members **RESOLVED** to approve the policy and the terms & conditions subject to changing the word standard to commercial under charging policy and remove the Annex A which includes the charges.

10. **ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

a. **Risk Assessment**

The Head of Governance and Strategic Partnerships provided an oral update to Council. A report and recommendations will be provided by the Finance and General Purposes Committee on 21st March 2023.

Members **NOTED** the report.

b. **Unity Trust Bank**

The Finance Manager indicated that the Town Council should be receiving the credit card for Unity Trust Bank in the next 7-10 days.

Members **NOTED** the written report.

11. **PUBLIC OPEN SESSION**

a. **Dave Hindle, Biggleswade**

On behalf of Biggs Welcome, Mr Hindle wanted to thank the Council for the grant.

12. **EXEMPT**

a. **Financial Assurance**

External Audit identified significant weaknesses in internal control during 2021/22 in respect of financial regulations regarding the reporting and authorisation of regular payments not being fully complied with. However, the Council answered yes to assertion 2 of the annual governance statement.

Whilst the Council undertook sufficient budget monitoring to comply with Proper Practice in the Practitioner's Guide, they identified significant expenditure on overtime, which they understand would have been challenged if had been separately identified in budget monitoring reports.

The Council complied with the statutory requirements regarding publication of external audits and the information was shared with Members via email on 28th September 2022, although had not been formally reported to Council or this committee.

Recommendations made in the audit report were:

1. The Council should ensure that financial regulations are fully complied with in future and consider answering no to assertion 2 of the 2022/23 annual governance statement if these weaknesses remained for a significant part of the 2022/23 financial year.
2. When setting the 2023/24 budget we recommend that the Council approves a separate overtime budget and monitors expenditure against it through the year.

The Clerk & Chief Executive reported that a robust process for the authorisation, reporting and monitoring of overtime was now in place using the CITRUS HR system and that overtime would be itemised separately in the 2023/24 budget.

Members **RESOLVED** to note the report and to observe that future discussions on financial assurance should be held in open session and be within one month of receipt of any external reports.

b. **Utility Contract**

Members **RESOLVED** to follow the advice of the legal team and write to the Utility Company as well as to invite the Energy Broker to a future Council meeting.

Members also **AGREED** to the recommendations made by the Town Clerk & RFO regarding lessons learned with any changes to be reported to either Town Council or the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

c. **Capital Assets Review – Working Group Update**

Members **NOTED** the progress of the project and agreed the recommendation of the report which was to instruct the chartered surveyor to complete an exercise to provide commercial valuations of assets.

Members **NOTED** that the Capital Assets Working Group will meet to focus on several aspects including a way forward and improvement costs.

The Chairman closed the meeting at **9.22pm**