



MINUTES OF THE FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
MEETING ON TUESDAY 21st MARCH 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 D Albone
Cllr I Bond
Cllr M Knight
Cllr M North
Cllr M Russell
Cllr D Strachan

Mr P Tarrant – Town Clerk & Chief Executive
Mr K Hosseini – Head of Governance & Strategic Partnerships (via Zoom)
Mr R Young – Finance Manager
Mr I Lord – Place Shaping Manager
Ms F Gumush – Meetings Administrator

Members of the Public – 0

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 G Fage.

NO APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr H Ramsay.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

a. Disclosable Pecuniary interests in any agenda item:

None.

b. Non-Pecuniary interests in any agenda item:

None.

3. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman had no announcements.

4. **PUBLIC OPEN SESSION**

No member of the public wished to speak.

5. **INVITED SPEAKER**

No guest speaker was invited.

6. **MEMBERS' QUESTIONS**

Cllr Knight indicated on 6th March he had read that the Biggleswade Town Council had begun a Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) consultation of up to £325,000 on their social media page.

Cllr Knight also noted that on 18th March he had read on the Town Council's social media page about recent fraudulent incidents at Council car parks.

In both instances Cllr Knight asked if the F&GP Chairman had been notified of either of these cases and wondered if social media was the correct forum for Members to be informed of them.

The F&GP Chairman responded to confirm that he had not been informed in advance of either of these social media posts or the incidents in the car parks. The Town Clerk & Chief Executive responded to the matter regarding the PWLB and noted that he believed Members had been briefed with regards to the consultation.

The Place Shaping Manager responding to the fraudulent activities indicated that Town Council Officers were aware and had informed the Police with regards to the issue.

Cllr Russell asked if any signs had been put up at the car parks to warn people not to engage with anybody with regards to ticket purchasing to which the Place Shaping Manager indicated that it could be done.

The Town Clerk & Chief Executive observed that it was good practice to ensure that any and all Council social media postings and/or significant events are properly highlighted to Members.

7. **MINUTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF MEETINGS**

No amendments were made to the minutes.

The Minutes were **APPROVED** as an accurate record of the Finance & General Purposes Committee held on 17th January 2023.

8. **MATTERS ARISING**

None.

9. **ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION**

a. **New Grants Policy**

Members discussed the report by the Finance Manager.

Several amendments were suggested on the policy:

- Under Important Dates to remove the words 'each January'.
- Change the word 'in accord' to 'in accordance'.
- Change the financial year to 2023-2024 for the new policy.

Subject to these amendments Members **RESOLVED** to accept the new grants policy as laid out.

b. **The Orchard Community Centre Hire Agreement**

Members discussed the revised hire agreement written by the Place Shaping Manager.

Several amendments were suggested to the Hire Agreement:

- Point 8 - to read 'should not overstay' rather than 'cannot overstay'.
- Point 8 - to read 'Any instances when' rather than 'Any instances in which'.
- Point 12 - has a typo 'Council' rather than 'Council'
- Point 25 - to read 'although reasonable effort' rather than 'although every effort'.
- Point 30 – Health and Hygiene should not be in capitals.
- Point 32 – remove 'children under eight years of age' and add "and other relevant legislation after the words "Children Act 1989".
- Point 34 – anyone should read 'any one'.
- The last point should be point 35 not point 23.

Subject to these amendments Members **RESOLVED** to accept the policy as laid out.

c. **Energy Broker Update Report**

The Finance Manager indicated that the Town Council gas contract with Osso Gas, is up for renewal at the end of April 2023. He added that the Town Council's electricity contract with Opus Energy also runs out at the end of June 2023 therefore an appropriate broker was needed to obtain market-relevant rates.

Members noted that a comparative paper of quotes received for brokers would have helped them to make an informed decision.

The Finance Manager indicated that as each broker offered a different service to the other, having a comparative table was not straight forward.

The Chairman observed that prices and quotes could be sourced by Officers as the Council only owned two premises which used gas.

Members **AGREED** to **DEFER** the report for the next Town Council meeting.

10. **ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

a. **Finance Review Update**

The Finance Manager indicated that good progress had been made as the financial year draws to a close. He pointed out that by the beginning of August the remaining five recommendations from the financial review will have been completed.

Members **NOTED** the report.

b. **Unity Trust Bank Update**

The Finance Manager who presented the report, noted that the cash encashment facility had now been moved from St Neots to Huntingdon because the St Neots branch is now closed.

Following Members queries regarding cash payments, The Finance Manager indicated that cash withdrawals were only needed every two months to source petty cash.

Members **NOTED** the report.

c. **Virements Quarterly Report**

Members **NOTED** the report.

d. **Finance Department Major Work Q1**

Members **NOTED** the report.

Cllr Russell also noted that she looked forward to new Management Accounting arrangements and hoped that the next F&GP Committee meeting of the new Council would set out exactly what the management accounting arrangements would be.

e. **General Insurance Policy Renewal**

The Head of Governance & Strategic Partnerships who briefed the Members pointed out that Officers had met the BHIB Broker in early March. The BHIB Broker pointed out that the market is very challenging at present and sent a renewal quote of £24,000.

The broker also confirmed that no other quotes had been forthcoming with two large insurers declining to submit quotes.

The Council's Insurance Broker covers 70% of the Town Council Marketplace and is a recognised specialist in the field. It is their expert belief that due to current circumstance; no additional quotation can be sourced. This is due to current market conditions.

The Head of Governance & Strategic Partnerships indicated that a report would be submitted to 28th March Town Council meeting with a recommendation that Members agree to suspend financial regulations and proceed with the recommended quote at £24,000. The latest quote was not a significant increase when compared to current inflationary pressures and in the opinion of the Broker represented good value for money.

Members **NOTED** the report.

11. **PUBLIC OPEN SESSION**

No member of the public wished to speak.

12. **EXEMPT**

a. **Fire Safety Compliance Update Report**

The Head of Governance & Strategic Partnerships noted that Officers had worked hard to deliver Town Council fire safety compliance across its nine assets.

Members both **WELCOMED** and **NOTED** the report.

b. **Risk Management Update Report**

The Head of Governance & Strategic Partnerships noted that Officers have been implementing the new risk framework across the business as per the existing external auditor's recommendation.

Officers thanked Members for their inputs.

The Town Clerk & Chief Executive asked that Officers reach out to Members and offer a separate meeting to explain the detailed context behind the new risk tool. This will add to Members understanding as the new framework does not lend itself to being easily printed.

Members **RECOMMENDED** that the new risk framework and management approach is adopted at the next Town Council meeting on the 28th of March 2023.

c. **Telephony Convergence Contracts Update Report**

The Head of Governance & Strategic Partnerships noted that quotes received from suppliers were bespoke and not directly like for like due to suppliers' different service provision. Members noted that the information provided was not sufficiently clear to make a decision and requested that a more comprehensive report is provided to compare the current provision with that proposed, including a review of the differing needs for different staff roles.

Members **NOTED** the report and **DEFERRED** the decision to Town Council on 28th March 2023.

d. **Selection of New Auditor Report**

The Finance Manager indicated that following a recent Finance Review it was recommended that as good practice, a new auditor was needed.

Officer's sourced quotes from several large companies and submitted their findings to Members.

Members **APPROVED** the recommendation of the Finance Manager to accept quote three.

The Chairman closed the meeting at **8.20pm**