



**MINUTES OF THE FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
MEETING ON TUESDAY 5th DECEMBER 2023 AT THE OFFICES OF
BIGGLESWADE TOWN COUNCIL, THE OLD COURT HOUSE, 4
SAFFRON ROAD, BIGGLESWADE COMMENCING AT 7.00PM**



PRESENT:

Cllr D Strachan (Chairman)
Cllr I Agnew (Deputy Chairman)
Cllr D Albone
Cllr G Barrett
Cllr M Knight (ex-officio voting Member)
Cllr M North
Cllr M Russell
Cllr S Sajid
Cllr C Thomas

Mr P Tarrant – Town Clerk & Chief Executive
Mr K Hosseini – Head of Governance & Strategic Partnerships (via Zoom)
Mr R Youngs – Head of Finance & Deputy RFO
Mr I Lord – Place Shaping Manager
Ms H Calvert - Administration & HR Manager

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 Mark Foster.

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**

Cllr Grant Fage, Ward Councillor

Cllr Fage commented on Item 10d, Annual Fees 2024 – 25, specifically for the Orchard Centre in Biggleswade East. Cllr Fage indicated that he carried out an informal study with regards to hiring out the centre with regular hirers to see what users of the Orchard thought about it. He pointed out that the feedback was generally positive, particularly citing some of the changes implemented over the last year related to the operating model.

Cllr Fage wanted to flag up the feedback he received from regular users who indicated that rooms were not always at capacity and came across as 'under-used'. They voiced concerns that the level of fees may be 'putting people off'.

Cllr Fage reiterated that an aggressive approach to seeking out new business and increasing the occupancy of the centre could be considered alongside a possible trial of restructuring fees for a year to see if it is possible to maximise the potential of the building.

5. **INVITED SPEAKER**

No guest speaker was invited.

6. **MEMBERS' QUESTIONS**

There were no Members questions.

7. **MINUTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF MEETINGS**

The draft Minutes were **APPROVED** as an accurate record of the Finance & General Purposes Committee held on Tuesday 19th September 2023.

8. **MATTERS ARISING**

None.

9. **ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION**

a. **Financial Regulations update reference charities**

The Town Clerk & Chief Executive noted that on p28 of the agenda pack, paragraph 15.1 should refer to regulation 16 not 17 as the current paper points to.

The Chairman pointed out that historically Financial Regulation 16 would stand on its own as a Financial Regulation and asked if Members would be happy to take this on board as part of the recommendation as it would be beneficial to have the charitable aspect separate from the asset aspect.

Members **RESOLVED** to accept the recommendation which suggested the insertion of the clause under the heading 'Charitable bodies' within the section 'Assets properties and estates'. Members also **RESOLVED** that the charitable aspect is separated as a stand-alone regulation from the asset aspect.

b. **Mayor's Expenses Finance Report – half yearly position**

The Head of Finance presented the report and noted that the report followed the 10th of October Town Council meeting where Members sanctioned the new civic functions, Town Mayor's Expenses and Town Mayor's Charitable Activities policy.

Members commenting indicated the following:

- The Mayoral Board engraving cost should not be included under charitable expenses but under a civic function cost.
- The report should mention what the Mayor's chosen charities are for the year rather than repeat it under every activity mentioned.
- The Town's Mayor's Expenses and Charitable Activities should be separated as different items on the report.

Members **RESOLVED** to accept the recommendation that the format and layout is considered prior to the paper being shared with Town Council on 12th December 2023.

c. **Fleet and Mower Replacement Report**

The Head of Governance & Strategic Partnerships presented the report and noted that the report was based on discussions held around growth. He indicated that the Council's fleet and mower are well maintained but to achieve this is increasingly expensive.

Commenting on various aspects of the report, Members noted the following:

- Decision Three looks at replacing the current Isuzu with a new Maxxus Electric Vehicle as it will cost less to run. However, there are no figures to show the running cost of the Isuzu. Members asked if an EV charger had been installed at the depo and what that would entail – would it be inside or outside of the building and what would the cost be.
- It is not detailed whether the cost of the charger is included in the deal with the purchase or leasing of the vehicle.
- The report looks at replacing vehicles with one single cab and one double cab vehicle. It was agreed previously that both cabs should be double due to increasing costs and more flexibility.
- The new specialist mower has added over £18,000 to the Council's revenue budget for next year and one that will need to be considered.
- Any final decisions should not be made until full figures of the budget are considered and what effect this will have on the precept.

Responding to some of the comments, the Head of Governance & Strategic Partnerships indicated that the EV Charger would come as part of the purchase of the vehicle and fitted in at the depo simply.

As for the single/double cab vehicles, he pointed out that in a single cab vehicle, three people in a row could be carried; whilst the double cab vehicle could carry five people.

Members agreed to take each recommendation individually and make decisions on each one.

Decision one: Members **RESOLVED** to **ACCEPT** the proposal to replace the Ford SUV vehicle with a new Ford Transit double cabin vehicle.

Decision two: Members **RESOLVED** to **ACCEPT** an indicative proposal to replace one of the current Kubotas (KX 68 AXU) with a new Ford Transit double cabin vehicle.

Decision three: Members **RESOLVED** to **NOT TO REPLACE** the Isuzu with a new Maxxus EV until further information about it is reported.

Decision four: Members **RESOLVED** to **ACCEPT** an indicative proposal to keep the Isuzu Long Wheelbase for another year.

Decision five: Members **RESOLVED** to **ACCEPT** an indicative proposal to keep the current Kubotas (LT 71 ZCL) for another 12 months.

Decision six: Members **RESOLVED** to suspend financial regulations to allow the procurement of a new specialist mower as recommended.

d. **Annual Fees 2024 - 25**

The Head of Finance presented the report and indicated that the annual fees were reviewed recently in great depth. He explained that the Appendices of Fees were colour coded to reflect the comprehensive consideration given during the meeting on 16th November.

Members agreed to take each category and cost area and agree on them in their respective blocks.

Members **RESOLVED** to **ACCEPT** the Scale of Charges for Market Stall Rents.

Members **RESOLVED** to **ACCEPT** the Scale of Charges for Allotment Holders.

Members discussed the Drove Road and Stratton Way Burial Grounds fees and noted that at the top of p48, there was an indicated that non-residents include anyone who has lived outside of Biggleswade for 3 years or more. In an informal meeting recently, it was discussed that this would require a review as it could include a Biggleswade resident, who for other reasons was not living within the town, for example, in a care home.

Members **RESOLVED** to **ACCEPT** the fees for the Drove Road and Stratton Way Burial Grounds and for the Burials Policy to be reviewed and brought back to Council at a later date.

Members **RESOLVED** to **ACCEPT** that the scale of charges for Orchard Community Centre remain as stand at the current years rate, for next year, subject to any changes that may occur by Council in the future.

Members **RESOLVED** to **ACCEPT** the scale of charges for hiring of sports facilities.

Members **RESOLVED** to **ACCEPT** the scale of charges for parking permits.

10. **ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

a. **Finance Review Update**

The Head of Finance explained that the report gave an overview of the continued progression of the Finance Review, which is now completed in full except for one point which related to car parks.

Members **NOTED** the report.

b. **Original Estimate Planning Cycle 24-25**

The Head of Finance explained that following a discussion with the Chairman of F&GP, he would be preparing a draft precept ahead of the next F&GP meeting in January, to give Members enough time to examine.

Members discussed arranging an informal precept meeting to give Members time to look over the documents ahead of the F&GP meeting on the 16th of January.

Members proposed that an informal precept meeting is held on 4th January 2024.

Members **NOTED** the report and agreed the informal precept for 4th January 2024.

c. **Risk Management update**

Members **NOTED** the report.

d. **Quarterly bank reconciliations**

The Chairman indicated that going forward the first two pages of the report relating to Unity Trust would suffice.

Members **NOTED** the report.

11. **PUBLIC OPEN SESSION**

Cllr Grant Fage, Ward Councillor

Cllr Fage commenting on Item 9d relating to the fees, noted that it was a sound decision by Town Council to pause the increase in fees for the Orchard Centre.

Cllr Fage noted that the Orchard Centre was on the agenda under exempt and therefore deciding how the centre can be used for the community was an important aspect for now and the future.

12. **EXEMPT**

a. **Orchard Centre Operating Model**

Members discussed the report.

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