

Finance and General Purposes Committee

22nd January 2024 at 7.30pm

All Saints Room, Didcot Civic Hall



Minutes

Note: These minutes are subject to approval as a true and correct record by the next meeting of this Committee.

Present:

Councillor T Worgan (Chair)
Councillor G Roberts (Deputy Chair)
Councillor N Hards
Councillor G Ryall
Councillor D Aragao
Councillor J Loder
Councillor J Broadbent

Officers:

Mrs J Wheeler – Town Clerk
Mrs L Blake – Deputy Town Clerk

A representative from Didcot Baby Monday attended the meeting.

127. Apologies

No apologies were tendered, all members were present.

128. Declarations of interests

No declarations were made.

129. To approve the Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 18th December 2023

The Chair paged through the minutes. It was proposed by Cllr J Loder, seconded by Cllr G Ryall, and RESOLVED to approve the minutes as an accurate record and note them as such. The vote was unanimous.

130. Questions on the minutes as to the progress of any item

There were no questions.

Standing Orders were suspended to allow the representative from Didcot Baby Monday to address the Committee regarding their Grant Aid application. All members agreed.

Public Participation

Kathryn Goldsby-West spoke in support of Didcot Baby Monday's application of £2,700, to contribute to the cost of offering support to the new mums in Didcot and surrounding areas.

Baby Monday has been running for 9 years and is an open access peer support group for new families. Their aim is to help build support networks for families in Didcot and the surrounding areas and offer advice on breast feeding and sleeping patterns. In 2023 a 'Bump access' group was formed to offer advice and support to expectant mums. The groups are free to attend but donations are welcomed. With the closures of all local Children's Centres, it is hoped that Baby Monday would be able to offer paediatric first aid courses in the future.

Cllr T Worgan thanked Kathryn for the information and invited Councillors to ask questions.

Cllr N Hards noted that the application confirmed that 90% of attendees live in Didcot 'or surrounding villages'. Kathryn answered that as the sessions are drop ins, they are open to all, and no-one would be turned away.

Cllr G Ryall suggested approaching other local authorities for funding, such as Western Valley Parish Council.

Cllr J Broadbent noted the increase in requested funding from the previous application in 2022. Kathryn explained that this was due to rising costs, competition for funding, increase in room hire charges and increase in need. Didcot used to have three Children Centre's, but all have now closed. The £2,700 would fully fund four months support. She also confirmed that Baby Monday is looking to register as a charity later this year, which could potentially open more funding opportunities.

Standing Orders were reinstated.

131. To consider two grant applications – Didcot Baby Monday and Thames Valley Play Association

The Committee considered the Didcot Baby Monday application first. It was proposed by Cllr N Hards, seconded by Cllr J Broadbent, and RESOLVED to award the full £2,700 to Didcot Baby Monday. All members agreed.

Kathryn thanked the Committee and left the meeting.

The Committee considered the application of £1,000 from Oxfordshire Play Association to contribute to the cost of delivering a Play and Activity Day in Didcot.

The Committee noted that the Town Council had previously supported this event but felt additional information on costs was needed before an informed decision was made.

It was proposed by Cllr G Ryall, seconded by Cllr J Broadbent, and RESOLVED to defer the application to either the February or March meeting, so that members could ask the applicant questions. All members agreed.

132. To approve the final figures for November 2023 accounts

The Chair paged through the figures.

Cllr N Hards was concerned about the amount of money outstanding on pages 6.42 and 6.43. The Town Clerk explained that most companies have long procedures to make payment and that these figures were correct as of 30th November 2023 – some payments would have been made by now. The Town Clerk further explained that should the Council decide to, some of the older, smaller amounts could be ‘written off’ but this would be a decision that would have to be made by full Council.

It was proposed by Cllr J Loder, seconded by Cllr J Broadbent, and RESOLVED to approve the accounts for November 2023. All members agreed.

133. To receive the budget papers for 2023-2024 with most of December figures

The Committee noted the budget papers for 2023-2024. The Town Clerk informed members that a new column had been added to the budget which would show ‘projected’ figures for 23-24. Although this would give Cllrs an idea of where the finances were going to be before the end of the financial year, the Town Clerk explained that invoices do tend to be received throughout April so the figures would not be accurate. Once DCK had closed each month, up to date figures could be sent to members.

Discussions were had regarding any surplus funds. Cllr T Worgan welcomed suggestions on what to do in this scenario and Cllr N Hards suggested going through the budget papers on a more in-depth basis at the next meeting. Cllr J Broadbent suggested more funds could be allocated to the Grant Aid budget due to the increase in hardship.

It was proposed by Cllr T Worgan and RESOLVED to receive the budget papers for 2023-2024 with most of December’s figures. All members agreed.

134. To receive the Edmonds Park Community & Sports Pavilion – cost report 8 – and an up-date on the project

The Committee noted the document from Ridge & Partners. The estimate of the construction costs is £2,198,074 and the overall project cost is £2,331,236. There is a contingency balance of £68,764 out of the total authorised expenditure of £2.4m.

Cllr TW asked about the completion date. The Town Clerk explained that the planned handover is scheduled for 16th February 2024.

A decision had been made to not install EV chargers at this time, due to the proposed location, but that the electrical contractor would store the units free of charge, for DTC until they are needed.

The Town Clerk explained that there has been issues raised by a local resident regarding the outside lighting of the building, shining into their property. A different

lighting scheme could potentially delay opening. This subject was due to be raised with Ridge and LIFE at the site progress meeting on 25th February 2024.

Discussions were had on what type of opening the building should have. It was agreed that a formal opening where visitors could take a walk about, would be beneficial. Officers would arrange this.

135. To note the investment fact sheet at the end of December 2023 from CCLA

The Committee noted the fact sheet. It confirmed that the interest rate was 5.29% as of 31st December 2023.

136. To note the CCTV newsletter for second half of 2023

The Committee noted the CCTV newsletter.

137. To approve a 36-month direct debit for Rabbits Van Hire for the outside team at a cost of £545 per month plus VAT

The Committee considered the request to approve the costs for a new vehicle for the outdoor team. It was proposed by Cllr T Worgan, seconded by Cllr J Broadbent, and RESOLVED to approve the 36-month direct debit for Rabbits Van Hire at £545 per month, plus VAT. All members agreed.

138. To consider the appointment of a consultant to overview the new North Brook Community Centre building (deferred from January full Council)

The Town Clerk confirmed that communication with developers on this project, have not been easy and the Council have not been receiving updates as promised. The Committee discussed options on how to open communication and whether to instruct a Solicitor to contact them on the Council's behalf.

It was proposed by Cllr J Broadbent, seconded by Cllr TW, and RESOLVED for the Town Clerk to write a letter to the developers, requesting a timescale of updates. Once the information was received, a decision on whether to appoint a consultant can be made. All members agreed.

139. To consider whether to have three grants meetings a year instead of every F&GP meeting

Members considered the report. Cllr G Ryall was broadly supportive of the proposal but suggested that the Committee had an ability to discuss urgent applications when needed.

It was proposed by Cllr T Worgan, seconded by Cllr G Roberts, and RESOLVED to recommend to full Council that Grant Aid applications are discussed three times a year, except for 'extreme and exceptional circumstances'. This would need to be advertised on all social media platforms. All members agreed.

140. To approve the sum of £500 to be allowed for staff meetings and Christmas functions

The Committee considered the report. It was proposed by Cllr G Ryall, seconded by Cllr N Hards, and RESOLVED to approve the sum of £500. All members agreed.

141. To discuss the possible cost of making the Real Living Wage (as defined by the Living Wage Foundation) policy for suppliers

The Committee discussed this proposal for future contracts. It was proposed by Cllr T Worgan, seconded by Cllr J Loder, and RESOLVED to recommend a Real Living Wage Policy to full Council. All members agreed.

142. To note the grant reports from Ridgeway Educational Trust; Free Christmas lunch 2023; Home Start; Didcot Baptist Church Toddlers Group

The Committee noted the reports and asked that they are posted on the Town Council's website.

143. To review the progress report

The Committee reviewed the report. Work on the Risk Assessments and the Wayleave agreement are on-going. It was confirmed that there had been no response to DTC's AGAR enquiry.

144. Exclusion of the press and public

It was **RESOLVED** to exclude the press and public from the meeting pursuant to Section 1 of the Public Bodies [Admission to Meetings] Act 1960 on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

145. To receive the minutes of the CCTV December meeting

The Committee received the minutes of the December CCTV meeting.

146. To up-date the Committee on the status of the agreement for Ladygrove East site

The Committee considered the update on the status of the agreement provided to them by the Town Clerk at the meeting. A Solicitor had been appointment and work on the agreements had started. Meetings had been arranged with SODC and the developer.

Signed: _____(Chair)

Date: _____