

Didcot Town Council

Finance and General Purposes Committee

18th December 2023 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

113. Apologies

Apologies were tendered by the Deputy Town Clerk.

114. Declarations of interests

No declarations were made.

115. To approve the Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 20th November 2023

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

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

Cllr G Ryall asked a question regarding the issues with Thames Water connecting the new pavilion at Edmonds Park with water. The Town Clerk stated that the issue had been covered in detailed reports from our consultants Ridge & Partners which have been circulated to members. There were no further questions.

Post meeting note: Thames Water have successfully connected the new pavilion to water during their site visit earlier in the day.

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

Public Participation

Deborah Watts spoke in support of Citizens Advice's (CA) application of £11,000, to contribute to the cost of running the Didcot office. She explained that CA do not get any Government funding for the services they provide and that they are rapidly outgrowing their current space at King Alfred Community Centre whilst looking to carry out more outreach work. Last year the specialists at the CA in Didcot, helped approximately 1800 people, of which 993 lived in one of the Didcot wards. The clients rarely have single issues but one of the biggest challenges for 2024 is expected to be homelessness. The primary issue within Didcot is around access to benefits and debt, the biggest being council tax arrears. The CA are also struggling to recruit staff and volunteers and funding is always challenging.

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

Standing Orders were reinstated.

117. To consider one grant application – Citizen's Advice – and to confirm the treatment of the delayed grant for Abingdon Bridge charity

It was proposed by Cllr G Roberts, seconded by Cllr N Hards, and RESOLVED to award the full £11,000 to Citizens Advice. All members agreed.

Deborah thanked the Committee and left the meeting.

Cllr T Worgan explained that although the Abingdon Bridge charity was awarded £4,200 at the last F&GP meeting, they have requested receiving the funds in the next financial year – from April 2024. The option was to reserve the grant from this financial year – which would mean no further funding for other grants – or to fund this grant from the 24-25 budget which would mean starting the new financial year with a lower amount of available grant funding.

The Town Clerk informed members that there were two pending applications for consideration at the next Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting – this was a request for £1,000 for the Oxfordshire Play Association Fun Day and £2,700 for Didcot Baby Monday.

It was proposed by Cllr T Worgan, seconded by Cllr J Broadbent, and RESOLVED to award the £4,200 grant to Abingdon Bridge from the 2024-2025 budget. If there were any surplus funds in any cost centre at the end of the financial year, these could be vired to the 2024-2025 Grant Aid budget (with Full Council approval). All members agreed.

118. To receive and approve the final figures for October 2023 accounts

The Chair paged through the report.

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

119. To receive the draft budget figures for 2024 – 2025 financial year

The budget figures were based on a working precept of £1,470,433, up from the current precept of £1,331,855. Cllr T Worgan had worked with the Town Clerk, the Deputy Town Clerk and DCK Accounting Solutions to review current income and expenditure and project what will be needed to deliver services and facilities for the next financial year. At the meeting £116,000 was trimmed from the budget figures presented to the Committee at the November meeting.

The OSM also provided the Committee with a summary of the outdoor team's workload and to confirm the need for the two replacement positions to be filled.

The Committee considered the draft budget figures for the 2024-2025 financial year. The budget did not include any funds for the running costs of the Splash Park; no budget for the grass cutting or for boosting the end of year reserves.

The Town Clerk identified a potential saving of £21,479 for not locking the gates at Edmonds Park - with the opening of the new pavilion in February 2024, the gates would need to be open in the evenings for hirers to access the facilities. The Town Clerk also informed the Committee of an approximate £15,000 saving on the utilities for the Willowbrook Leisure Centre as the Estates Officer had negotiated a much better fixed tariff.

The Chair asked the Town Clerk to produce a report detailing these costs to be presented at the next meeting.

Concerns were raised regarding the increase to the precept. The Chair explained that a lot of work had been taken to ensure increases were minimal without affecting the quality and level of services of the Town Council and that the draft budget protects the services and produces a balanced budget for 2024-2025.

Cllr G Ryall queried the large percentage increase in the cemetery budget (page 7.32).

NB - It was noted after the meeting that this was because there was no budget set for the maintenance of the cemetery in the 2023-2024 financial year. There are costs involved with maintaining the cemetery, with the driveways due to be filled and repaired in 2024.

Cllr J Broadbent asked that members consider increasing the Grant Aid budget by the inflation rate of 4.4% due to the increase in challenges faced by Didcot residents - this would be an additional £2,000 increase – taking the cost centre to £47,000 per annum.

It was proposed by Cllr T Worgan and seconded by Cllr J Broadbent and RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND the draft budget to Full Council for approval with a £2,000 increase to the Grant Aid fund (cost centre 201/3188). It was RESOLVED to retain the funding for the removal of the locking of Edmonds Park gates and the

Willowbrook utilities budget as these funds could be vired to cover extra grass cutting or Splash Park running costs.

The Committee agreed to hold a Working Group meeting on the budget on Wednesday 3rd January 2024 at 6pm, so that members could discuss any particular concerns in more detail. Any changes to the draft budget would be presented to Full Council as an amendment at the meeting on 8th January 2024.

All members agreed.

120. To review and consider the Precept request for 2024 – 2025 financial year

The Committee reviewed the precept request as part of the 2024-2025 budget. The precept recommendation of £1,470,433 was proposed on a tax base of 11,035 which would result in a Band D property paying £133.25 per annum – an increase of approximately 7.7% or 5.2% on the council tax statement.

The working tax base has risen from 10,767.8 to 11,035.3; the numbers of tax paying properties in Didcot has risen from 13,676 to 13,943 an increase of approx. 2.5% based on increased housing and tax-paying properties. The Band D property tax would rise from £123.68 to £133.25 per annum – an actual rise of 5.2%.

It was proposed by Cllr T Worgan and seconded by Cllr N Hards and RESOLVED to RECOMMEND the budget for 2024 – 2025 with a precept of £1,470,433 for the 2024 – 2025 financial year. The vote was unanimous.

121. To receive the Edmonds Park Community & Sports Pavilion – cost report 7 – and an up-date on the project

The Committee noted the document from Ridge & Partners. The estimate of the construction costs is £2,193,034 and the overall project cost is £2,326,196. There is a contingency balance of £73,804 out of the total authorised expenditure of £2.4m.

The Town Clerk confirmed that there will be additional costs of approximately £10,000 due to the need for a generator for two weeks, as the electricity is not connected. The Town Clerk would liaise with LIFE on this issue.

The pavilion is due to be completed by 2nd February 2024, with potential new bookings to start in spring 2024. An official opening would be arranged.

NB: it has been confirmed that the additional costs of the generator will be around £6,000 for two weeks and not £10,000.)

122. To note the investment fact sheet at the end of November 2023 from CCLA

The Committee noted the fact sheet. It confirmed that the interest rate was 5.30% as of 30th November 2023.

123. To consider the revised request from Didcot Town Youth FC

The Committee considered the revised request detailed in the report. The Committee discussed the installation of a small kitchen area and tea urn in one of the changing rooms and the request to 'fence in' the compound. They were supportive of these,

subject to planning confirmation from SODC and confirmation that the costs would be covered by the Club.

The removal of the waste and the cost of the tournament park hire were also discussed. Members were keen to ensure all hirers were treated fairly and as such, DTYFC must pay the hire fee for the tournament fixture. The Club would not be permitted to dispose of their waste in the Town Council skips, due to the high cost of waste removal and the risk of contamination. Members were keen to ensure a detailed agreement was in place to protect both parties – this would not mean the Club has sole use of the facilities in the park.

It was proposed by Cllr T Worgan, seconded by Cllr J Broadbent, and **RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND** the £5,000 charge per year (fixed for 3 years) for DTYFC's use of Edmonds Park and the facilities during the football season. It was also **RESOLVED** to charge the Club the current hire fees for their tournament event (£720 from 1st April 2024 – which would not include marking of the pitches) and inform the Club that they would be responsible for removing their own waste. Any amendments to the welfare unit would be agreed, subject to clarification from the planning authority.

An amended draft agreement would be circulated to members for their approval.

124. To review the progress report

The Committee noted the progress report. SODC had recently released a press release regarding the CCTVs in Didcot.

The Town Clerk advised that a meeting with Restore should be sought to understand their plans for their new property on DTC owned allotment land. It was suggested inviting them to attend the February or March meeting of the Committee.

The Town Clerk confirmed that no response had been received regarding the AGAR query.

125. 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.

126. To review the confidential S106 draft agreement for Ladygrove East

The Committee reviewed the confidential draft agreements. The Town Clerk is currently liaising with solicitors regarding representation.

Meeting closed at 9.32pm

Signed: _____(Chair)

Date: _____