

GENERAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the General Services Committee held at 6.30pm on Tuesday, 19 October 2021 in the Town Hall, Banbury.

Present: Councillor Colegrave (Chairman)
Councillors: Bunce, Cherry, Dalton, Kilsby, Mears, Powell and Richards.

Officers: Mark Recchia (Town Clerk)
Mark Hassall (Deputy Town Clerk & RFO)
Paul Almond (Operations Manager)

GS.14/21 Apologies for Absence
Councillors Donaldson and Phillips.

GS.15/21 Declarations of Interest
None.

GS.16/21 Minutes of the Last Meeting

IT WAS RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting held on 31 August 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

GS.17/21 Income & Expenditure Report
The Committee considered a report prepared by the Deputy Town Clerk/RFO comparing year-to-date income and expenditure with the projected annual budget for the financial year. The report showed all expenditure incurred up to 8 October 2021.

Officers responded to a range of questions from Members relating to various budget codes and financial procedures. Members' attention was drawn to the fact that overall the Committee's expenditure was within forecast versus the phased YTD budget. This recognised timing of completion of capital works and improved grant income. The main variances were:

- Timing of Salaries and grounds maintenance costs impacted equally by seasonality and awaiting September invoicing, across Parks, Football pitches and Horton View. Annual costs would be reviewed during the 6+6 budgeting exercise.
- Increased expenditure on cleaning across the estate was offset by grant income from the Controlling Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) received into the Resources Committee within other income (£110k).
- Timing of capital expenditure invoices for Hillview MUGA refurbishment, which should be completed shortly, and Hillview play area refurbishment to be completed in 2022.
- Increased advertising on Bus Shelters was being funded by a grant received from COMF.

IT WAS RESOLVED to receive and note the Income and Expenditure report.

GS.18/21 Revised Estimates for 2021/22 & Draft Estimates for 2022/23
Members were asked to approve the revised estimates for 2021/22 and give initial consideration to the draft estimates for 2022/23. A Summary of the revised estimates was attached to the report together with a full copy of the Estimates.

The estimates included income from fees and charges, which for 2022/23 currently remained unchanged from this year, subject to receipt of guidance from the Grants & Budget Sub Committee. The estimates for 2022/23 had been set based on a 2% rise in precept, and a rise of 0.5% in households in the town due to general housing growth. A 2.5% inflation rise in salaries and specific contract costs had been assumed.

The following comments on the estimates were materially relevant:

GENERAL SERVICES

Cost Centre 103 & 104 Southam & Hardwick Cemetery

Increased salary and cleansing costs offset by reduced GM costs.

Cost Centre 110 Parks and Open Spaces

Increased salary costs relating to making a seasonal role full time. Investment in tree management software £20k. Installation of BBQ units in Spiceball and bike racks associated with healthy routes, funded by grant. Investment across the play estate maintenance, £200k over two years. Cleansing costs associated with expanded public toilet provision. Platinum Jubilee planting schemes.

Cost Centre 114 Park Rangers

Equipment purchase investment replaced with PPE, communication equipment and training.

Cost Centre 120 & 121 Football Pitches & Horton View

Additional ongoing cleaning costs. Repair of bowls green sprinkler system.

Cost Centre 160 Capital costs

Planned delivery of earmarked landscaping projects in St Marys, Peoples Park in 21/22, ongoing footpath repair programme and Hillview Play area refurbishment (earmark funding) in 22/23.

RESOURCES

Cost Centre 310 Town Council Events

Following hiatus, planning addition to recommencement of town events with funding of lights projection in the town centre in 21/22, investment diverted and increased to fund renewed Christmas lights scheme across the town.

Cost Centre 311 & 315 Town Hall & Other Services to the Public

Election costs in 21/22 and increased ongoing support by Banbury Town Council following the removal of Christmas Lights funding by Cherwell District Council to revive and renew the Christmas Lights scheme across the town (21/22 £98k and 22/23 £53k).

Cost Centre 320 Other Costs and Income

Covid grant funding completed in 21/22, offset by increased precept income.

Members asked various questions to which officers responded.

IT WAS RESOLVED to approve the revised estimates for 2021/22 as now submitted; and to refer the draft estimates for 2022/23 as submitted to the Grants and Budget Sub-Committee for further consideration.

GS.19/21 Parks and Cemeteries Monitoring Report

The Committee considered a report on the condition of the parks, recreation grounds, cemeteries and open spaces in Banbury. The report covered the following areas:

- Parks & Cemeteries Team.
- 4th Corner Landscape Contract.
- Park Ranger Service.
- Princess Diana Park – Drainage Scheme.
- Christmas Lights Contract update.

Parks and Cemeteries Staffing

Terms and conditions had been reviewed and a number of changes had been made aimed at stemming the turn-over of staff, attracting suitable candidates and retaining existing staff. All operational staff would now work 37 hours a week in line with all other Banbury Town Council Staff. All Job Descriptions and Person Specifications had been reviewed. Consultation and assimilation meetings were held with all existing staff and new Contracts of employment issued reflecting the changes.

This work was undertaken during September and had now been completed. All existing staff had signed new contracts of employment. The new structure for the operational Team was:

- a) Parks & Cemeteries Manager
- b) Cemeteries Supervisor
- c) Parks Supervisor
- d) 2 x Parks & Cemeteries Lead Operatives
- e) 3 x Parks & Cemeteries Operatives

Recruitment was underway to fill the last two vacant positions, the Parks Supervisor and a Parks and Cemeteries Lead Operative.

4th Corner Landscape Contract

Officers had no issues or concerns with the Contractor's performance, service delivery was generally very good and the work programme was being delivered as per the schedules. The only work stream a little bit behind was hedge cutting, which was being addressed.

Park Ranger Service

Despite further staff shortages caused by Covid 19 issues, the team had been busy with the continued Health & Safety inspections and repairs to children's play areas. They had also been assisting the Cemetery Team with burials whilst that team has been short staffed. The Ranger team had assisted in preparation and running of a number of events including:

- 04/09/2021 - Emergency Services Day – Spiceball Park
- 17/09/2021 – BBOWT Wildflower Seeding – Princess Diana Park
- 28/08/2021 - BID Summer Garden Party Event – Town Centre
- 04/10/2021 - Womens Cycling Tour – Town Centre
- 19/09/2021 – Battle of Britain – St Mary's Church
- 15/09/2021 – BBC CBeebies Filming – Spiceball Park

Princess Diana Park – Drainage

Members are advised that the drainage scheme to prevent water run-off from Princess Diana Park into Mold Crescent was completed by Oxfordshire County Council the first week of September. Following the completion, the Landscape Officer worked with BBOWT volunteers, to sow wild flower seed on the swale undertaken on the 17th September 2021. BBOWT would have a monitoring and maintenance role going forward.

Christmas Light Contract – Update

The joint tendering exercise between Banbury Town Council and Cherwell District Council for a new Christmas Light Scheme for the Town's on-street displays and the Castle Quay Shopping Centre displays had been completed. Following the evaluation by a joint panel of both organisations, including the Council Leader, Cllr Mallon and the Chairman of General Services, Cllr Colegrave, the successful tenderer was Blachere Illuminations Ltd.

In response to a Member's question regarding the opening of the new toilet block the Operations Manager acknowledged that there had been delays due to the construction company having gone into Administration towards the end of the project, necessitating snagging works having to be undertaken by third parties. These had now been completed and the facility was now ready for use.

It was then **RESOLVED** to:

- (1) note the Parks and Cemeteries Service Update.
- (2) note the 4th Corner Landscape Contract Update.
- (3) note the Park Ranger Service Update.
- (4) note the update on the Princess Diana Park Drainage Scheme.
- (5) note the Christmas Light Contract Tendering outcome.

The meeting ended at 7.40pm