

GENERAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the General Services Committee held at 6.30pm on Tuesday, 18 October 2022 in the Town Hall, Banbury.

Present: Councillor Phillips (Chairman)
Councillors: Bunce, Cherry, Colegrave, Dalton, Hussain, Mears, Powell.

Alternate Members: None

Officers: Mark Hassall (Town Clerk & RFO)
Paul Almond (Director of Environment)
Martyn Surfleet (Executive Officer)

GS.15/22 Apologies for Absence
Cllr Donaldson, Cllr Richards

GS.16/22 Declarations of Interest
None.

GS.17/22 Minutes of the Last Meeting
IT WAS RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting held on 30 August 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

GS.18/22 Income & Expenditure Report
The Committee considered a report prepared by the 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 19 August 2022.

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.

General Services variances are principally

- Staffing vacancies contributing £21k, recruitment of both a supervisor and cleaner within the grounds maintenance team is ongoing, and current long term sick is currently being backfilled with agency staff.
- Increase in insurance costs (£17k)
- Timing of invoicing for grounds maintenance works impacted by timing of October invoicing across Parks, Football pitches and Horton View, and offset by increased grass cutting schedule for Peoples Park to mitigate impact of staff vacancies.
- Ongoing play area equipment being refurbished across the estate awaiting completion £39k.
- Prior year utility charges for MUGA's from OCC £6k
- Timing of Banbury in Bloom invoices, cleaning and wax of Fine Lady Statue moved to bi-annual frequency.
- Café build in People's Park due to be opening in late autumn, with Earmarked Reserves to be released following practical completion (£87k)

Underspends on Resources Committee also principally

- Reduced Central Admin costs including salaries and training £36k.
- Town Council Events are currently within budget parameters, with underspends due to staffing costs.
- Increase in insurance costs (£14k) are offset by reduced legal costs £6k.
- Other services to the Public include timing of small grants, Other Costs & Income includes increased interest income.

Financial Effects & Risk Assessment

This is a monitoring report so there are no specific financial effects arising from it. Without effective budget monitoring there is a risk that budgets will not be adhered to, thereby weakening the Council's ability to demonstrate an effective use of resources. This risk is being mitigated by closer monitoring of spend using a phased budget.

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

GS.19/22

Parks and Cemeteries Monitoring Report

The team are busy removing the summer bedding and preparing beds for the spring bedding delivery and bulb planting.

The football season has started, pitches were prepared for play as per the sports pitch bookings, initial marking of the pitches and are now been over marked each week.

Grass cutting operations are still on-going and will continue until growth shows signs of slowing up.

The cemeteries team continues to develop as the new recruits are being trained on grave digging to add resilience. We are starting to see an increase in funeral bookings over the last couple of weeks.

The remaining staff have now received training on the safe use of the chipper, which as we move into the winter pruning will bring the benefits of recycling our green waste for mulching borders instead of paying for skip hire. The Parks Supervisor has resigned. To ensure service delivery we have covered this role temporarily by employing a general operative agency worker, supplemented by a combination of external contractors to mow the main lawn in People's Park and carryout specialist fine turf operations at Horton View bowling green.

We still have one operative on long term sick, which we have been covering with an agency worker.

The team are up to date with the scheduled work, and will soon be undertaking leaf clearance as autumn leaf fall is upon us.

4th Corner Landscape Contract Update

The contractor is delivering the programmed work, although slightly behind schedule, this is due unfortunately to the Contract Supervisor being off long term sick. They have drafted in an area manager to oversee the operation until the supervisor returns which has improved performance.

Grass cutting operations are still being undertaken.

Sports pitch preparation was completed prior to the start of the season, aeration operations are scheduled in to take place each month during the playing season, however, this is weather dependant.

Shrub border weeding operations are on schedule.

The second road side channel weed control treatment was due to be completed by end of September, this is now scheduled to be completed 28/10/2020.

The team will start removing the summer bedding and preparing beds for the spring bedding delivery and bulb planting.

The Councils Landscape Officer continues work closely with the contract supervisor along with site inspections to monitor their performance.

Tree Works & Planting Update

The external tree survey for this year is almost complete, which will enable the landscape officer to prioritise, package and tender our proactive tree works for this financial year.

The Tree Planting for the Queens Green Canopy Scheme have been ordered and are due to be delivered and planted in October and November:

Crouch Hill - The circle of 24 trees, Acer Campestre "Queen Elizabeth"
Hill View Park – The avenue of 20 trees, Quercus Robur

The Park Ranger Service Update

Inspections

- Annual H&S Inspection of Play grounds - ordered – Waiting for start date
- Aerial runways - Independent inspection ordered - Waiting for start date.
- Bus Shelters - Inspections completed.
- Play Area Weekly Inspections – Completed

Play Area refurbishment update is:

- Peoples Park – Replacement see-saw, balance beam and wet pour repairs – Completed.
- Spiceball Park - Skate Park Ramp surface replacement and water proofed – Completed.
- Lapsley Drive – Replacement Multi-play unit, round-about, and benches – ordered waiting for install date from Wicksteed (estimated 10-12 weeks).
- Hastings Park – Viper swing parts arrived - fitting by rangers by 21/10/2022.

The team continued to keep up to date with Health & Safety inspections and the resulting repairs to our children's play areas.

Signage Peoples Park – New additional finger post and replacement fingers were delivered, and are due to be installed before Remembrance Sunday.

Notice Board Refurbishments – all spares have arrived, painting contractors have been given an order, once painting has been undertaken, new backing boards and glazing will be fitted by the Rangers.

The Ranger Service also provided support for Canal day setting up and taking down the event.

Fencing Repairs Update

- Stanbridge Park – Order raised for the installation of new galvanised metal knee rail fence – Manufacturing underway, waiting for a date for installation.
- Bridge Street Park – Order raised for the installation of a new galvanised metal knee rail fence – Manufacturing underway, waiting for date for installation.
- Peoples Park – Timber fencing refurbishment, we have engaged with the Probation Service who are going to work with the Town Council, using local offenders, through the community payback scheme to prepare and paint the timber fences throughout the Park.

Cleansing Service Update

Following interviews, a candidate has been offered the part-time cleaner role for pavilions, subject to medical clearances and satisfactory references being received a start date should be imminent.

Christmas Light Contract Update

The Blachere Illumination Ltd installation contractors have started on site completing the pull tests and electrical checks. They have completed the installation of lights within the Bridge Street tree canopies and will return to complete the main town displays following the Michaelmas Fairs departure.

Peoples Park Café – Update

There are still some outstanding works to complete the building they are:

- Work tops, serving island and customer table (orders placed)
- Fitting of external defibrillator (orders placed)
- Completion of any snagging works.
- Sign-off by Building Control and Fire Service.
- Fitting of outside canopy.

The project completion date for items (a-d) is expected to be 31st October 2022. Leaving item e) to be a later date when product is delivered from France.

The Café Operator “Carls Kitchen” has been offered and accepted the opportunity to run the facility. The legal documents are being drawn up for a licence to start on 1st November 2022

It was then **RESOLVED** to:

1. To note the Parks and Cemeteries Service Update.
2. To note the 4th Corner Landscape Contract Update.
3. To note the tree works and planting Update.
4. To note the Park Ranger Service Update.
5. To note the update regarding fencing replacements and repairs.
6. To note the Cleansing Service Update.
7. To note the Christmas Light Contract Update.
8. To note the Peoples Park Café Update.

GS.20/22 CRM & Reporting Tool

The Committee considered a report prepared by the Executive Officer providing options for tendering a new customer relationship management system and online reporting tool as well as a booking system for events and facilities, via The Council's website and potential mobile application

Officers responded to a range of questions from Members relating to various aspects of the report. Members' attention was drawn to the fact that due to the complexity of the task at hand subsequent meetings with nominated elected members and further discussions with officers will be required before proceeding.

Suggestion for a resolution

It is suggested that separate dedicated providers for both the CRM / reporting tools and a booking system be sought.

It was by recommendation that officers, in consultation with an elected member, engage with providers in the potential contracting of their services.

It is recommended that officers be permitted to continue to research providers that will aim to solve the unique solutions required in providing residents and officers clear and simple access to our events and facilities booking.

Financial Effects & Risk Assessment

Banbury Town Council has a commitment to provide robust services and positive interactions with its residents. By providing an improved and more accessible route of communication

It is anticipated that by improving the booking systems we should see a larger uptake in bookings of our facilities which will enable us to serve the community on a larger scale.

Whilst there is both the initial financial outlay and subsequent contract fees involved with sourcing new IT systems, it is believed that this can be mitigated with an improvement to turnaround of enquiries that will then free up officers to tackle projects of a greater scale. As well as the predicted improved income from potential rise in hirers of facilities.

Earmarked reserves are available for initial costs, with ongoing licencing fees being subject to annual budgeting provisions.

It was then **RESOLVED** to:

- To note the CRM, Reporting and Booking tool report.
- To authorise officer recommendations to engage with contractors in consultation with a nominated elected member(s), to commence with contracting the agreed solutions.
- To authorise officers to continue researching facility and events booking solutions in consultation with a nominated elected member, to source a better suited solution based on officer's recommendations.

The meeting ended at 7.35pm