

GENERAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the General Services Committee held at 6.30pm on Tuesday, 23 March 2021 by Zoom.

Present: Councillor Clarke (Chairman)
Councillors: Beverly, Cherry, Dhesi, Mephram and Richards.

Alternate Members: Councillor Hussain (for Councillor Kilsby).

Also in attendance: Tony Brummell (Cherwell District Council) for Minute GS.46/19

Officers: Mark Recchia (Town Clerk)
Mark Hassall (Deputy Town Clerk & RFO)
Paul Almond (Operations Manager)
Nicky Halford (Cemeteries Manager)
Julia O'Shea (Landscape Officer)

GS.43/19 Apologies for Absence
Councillor Kilsby.

GS.44/19 Declarations of Interest
None.

GS.45/19 Minutes of the Last Meeting

IT WAS RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting held on 28 January 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

GS.46/19 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.

Officers responded to a range of questions from Members relating to various budget codes. Members' attention was drawn to the fact that overall the Committee's expenditure was within forecast.

Variances were principally:

- ◆ Timing of invoicing for CDC cleansing contract across green space (£131k).
- ◆ Timing of tree works contracts being placed (£25k) and playground equipment replacement timing (£17k).
- ◆ Capital costs incurred had seen the toilets being completed at People's Park with associated groundworks. Underspends within capital costs were offset by delayed release of earmarked reserves, so would not create an overall impact by the end of year.

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

GS.47/19 Parks and Open Spaces Monitoring Report
The Committee considered a report on the condition of the parks, recreation grounds and open spaces in Banbury. The report covered the following areas:

- People's Park Projects.
- A Motion on Sensory Gardens referred from the Council meeting.
- Drainage issues at Princess Diana Park, seeking approval to a scheme to remedy the situation, in partnership with Cherwell District and Oxfordshire County Councils.
- The resumption of outdoor sports, including sports pitch refunds where leagues had cancelled the remainder of the season and/or grounds maintenance issues arising from extension of the football season.
- Adoption of play and sports areas, public art, allotments and additional open space on various developments at Dukes Meadow Drive, Warwick Road, Longford Park and Hanwell View.

Peoples Park Projects

It was noted that a revised planning application had now been registered for the Café/Kiosk facility, which contained works within the existing building envelope. Work was also progressing on drawing up tender documentation.

Whilst the new toilet/mess room facility within the walled garden was also complete and in use by grounds staff, snagging issues were still being resolved. The separate groundworks/tarmac resurfacing works around the building had also now been completed. Designs were also now being worked on for re-landscaping of the remaining area within the walled garden, with the brief to return it to a Victorian-style kitchen garden.

It was also reported that during the construction of the new facilities within the walled garden an external junction box was installed in readiness (if agreed by Members) to power an electricity extension to be taken to Bath Road car park for a facility for charging electric vehicles. A member commented that some residents had concerns over the potential loss of parking spaces at Bath Rd car park should EV charging points be introduced there.

Sensory Gardens

Members were reminded that a Motion was submitted to the Council Meeting in November 2020 that:

"This council notes the positive impact of sensory garden areas for disabled people. This council tasks officers with beginning the work of a transformative renewal of the sensory areas in our parks. This is part of the council's commitment to the principle of 'building back better' from the Coronavirus pandemic."

The motion had been referred under Standing Order 4h to the General Services Committee for investigation. There used to be a sensory garden within People's Park, which it was believed had been located within the Rose Garden, but there were other parks that might also benefit from this initiative. Indeed, Officers had begun introducing some elements of Sensory Garden planting within recent planting schemes.

Drainage Issues at Princess Diana Park

Tony Brummell (CDC) attended the meeting for this item and provided Members with the background to the issue and a proposed solution. The Town Council's consent was needed to the scheme, along with a small funding contribution to cover the costs of the works within the park and in making the connection to the nearby Thames Water sewer. It was likely that the County Council's contractors would undertake the works.

Sports Pitch Hires

Under the Government's "roadmap" outdoor sports were able to resume with effect from 29 March 2021. However, requests had been received from a number of clubs for a refund of pitch hire fees due to curtailment of the playing season as a result of the pandemic. It was noted that the cost of offering refunds for the second half of the season would be in the region of £5000.

Land Adoptions

There were a wide range of public facilities coming forward for adoption at various sites across the town, including sports pitches/changing rooms; MUGA/play areas; allotments; and public art. The sites under consideration at this time were:

- Davidson Homes Development off Dukes Meadow Drive
- Miller Homes Development off Warwick Road
- Longford Park consortium
- Bellway Homes Development at Hanwell View

The Committee was generally in favour of adopting these facilities where officers were satisfied that they were up to adoptable standards and that adequate commuted sums had been negotiated. One area where it was noted that maintenance costs might exceed commuted sums on offer was in respect of public art at Longford Park and Officers would be seeking further clarification of likely costs, but it was acknowledged that the facilities on the site had to be viewed in the round rather than cherry-picking certain elements only.

IT WAS RESOLVED to:

- (1) note the updates on People's Park projects.
- (2) note the current situation regarding Sensory Gardens and to seek a further report exploring options and costs for taking this forward.
- (3) agree to the scheme to alleviate water run-off from the springs in Princess Diana Park outlined in the report and authorise the Town Clerk to enter into any required Licence Agreements and make any necessary permit applications for the works.
- (4) approve the offer of refunds on football pitch hires to hirers for the second half of the season.
- (5) agree in principle to the adoption of the public areas identified in the report, subject to any snagging work identified being completed to the satisfaction of BTC Officers and to the payment of associated commuted sums.

GS.48/19

Confidential Business Exclusion

It was proposed by the Chairman and was **RESOLVED** that, in accordance with Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the public and press be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the items set out below on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the general interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

The meeting ended at 8pm

SUMMARY of items discussed during confidential session

GS.49/19 Cleaning & Cleansing Contracts

The Committee considered a report of the Operations Manager seeking approval to extend the existing contracts for cleaning and cleansing services for a further year.

Members were reminded that at its meeting on 28 January 2020 (Minute GS.41/19 refers) this Committee approved the letting of a 12-month cleaning contract to Goshen Multi-services Ltd for cleaning of sports changing rooms and the public toilets at Cemeteries. The contract also allowed for the possibility of other sites being added in, including the proposed new toilets and mess room facility at People's Park. This contract was due to expire on 31 March 2021 but had been advertised with a provision for extension subject to satisfactory performance.

Members were further reminded that cleansing operations (litter-picking within parks) were removed from the GM Contract and approval was given to negotiate directly with CDC for this work. (Minute GS.09/14 refers). In January 2015 (Minute GS.38/14 refers) the Committee also agreed to award the Cleansing Contract to Cherwell District Council. In the absence of any changes being negotiated by either side and to ensure continued service provision during the pandemic the SLA for these services had continued in operation on the previously agreed basis. Officers had no concerns over the quality of service.

With effect from 1 April 2020 the Town Council had taken some Grounds Maintenance services (People's Park, St Mary's Churchyard and cemeteries) in house, operating out of the Southam Road Cemetery Depot. There was now an opportunity to look at Cleaning and Cleansing Services in the round and determine whether these should continue to be externalised or whether any elements should also be brought within the scope of an expanded in house team. However, an interim solution was needed in the meantime to ensure continued service provision over the next year whilst these options were considered in more detail.

RESOLVED that the Cleaning and Cleansing contracts be extended for a further 12-month period.

GS.50/19 People's Park – New Toilets and Mess Room Facility: Contractual Issues

The Committee considered a verbal update from the Town Clerk on issues being experienced in achieving minor defect rectifications at the new facility.

RESOLVED that the position be noted.

GS.51/19 New Cemetery Land

Officers had been working with consultants Cemetery Development Services in discharging Planning Conditions. These included sign off from the County Archaeologist, as well as submission of a detailed Landscaping Scheme. A phased layout drawing and cost estimates had been drawn up by CDS and were presented at the meeting.

RESOLVED that the position be noted.