

GENERAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the General Services Committee held at 6.30pm on Tuesday, 06 June 2023 in the Town Hall, Banbury.

Present: Councillor Phillips (Chairman)
Councillors: Biegel, Bunce, Cherry, Colegrave, Mears, Richards.

Alternate
Members: Cllr Richards for Cllr Hussain

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

GS.4/23 Apologies for Absence
Cllr Ayers, Cllr Bishop, Cllr Hussain.

GS.5/23 Declarations of Interest
None.

GS.6/23 Minutes of the Last Meeting
IT WAS RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 March and 16 May 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

GS.7/23 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 22 May 2023.

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 £9k
- Computer software to support play equipment and grounds maintenance monitoring.
- Timing of invoicing for grounds maintenance works impacted by seasonality and awaiting invoicing, across Parks, Football pitches and Horton View.
- Purchase of defibrillators at pavilions across the estate.

Underspends on Resources Committee also principally

- Reduced Central Admin costs including salaries.
- Town Council Events income includes sponsorship across events and are ahead of budget, with costs incurred in advance but managed within planned budgets. The recent coronation celebration increased expenditure of (£7k) was offset by increased income of £5k, with a net £2k overspend incurred on litter disposal.
- 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.8/23 Parks and Cemeteries Monitoring Report

The team are up to date with the scheduled work.

The start to the mowing season has gone well, with the Park, Cemeteries and St Marys Churchyard have been maintained to high standard.

Staff continue to be busy with burial duties.

The Memorial Stability Survey is now completed, grave owners are being contacted regarding any that have failed.

The three new employees have now commenced employment with us.

All the Safe Use of Machinery and Equipment Training has been completed by the new employees.

The Spring Bedding has now been removed in preparation for the Summer planting. Members of the public benefitted from the plant giveaway this year.

Planting in the park days with local school children is organised for the 14th and 15th of June.

The football season has now finished, and staff are now engaged with the weekly operations for bowling green maintenance.

4th Corner Landscape Contract Update

The contractor has experienced some staff vacancies which delayed the second and third cut, therefore, some sites were longer during May than they should have been. They have now commenced the 4th cut and should catch-up during this cycle.

Road channel weed treatment spraying has been completed on schedule.

Following football post removal, sports pitch post season renovation works are underway, aeration operations, dressing and seeding of goal mouths.

Shrub border maintenance is on schedule.

The Contract Supervisor is still off work long term sick. The area manager continues to cover the role and oversee operations until the supervisor returns.

The Council's Landscape Officer continues to work closely with the contractor in addition to carrying out site inspections to monitor their performance.

Ranger Service / Play Area Update

The Park Ranger Team continue to keep up to date with the weekly Health & Safety inspections and carrying out any repairs resulting from those inspections.

The team is working through works identified in the annual inspection report.

Play Area refurbishment update is:

Princess Diana Park – The play area refurbishment contract started installation on the 2nd June, project should be completed within 3 weeks, in time for the school Summer Holidays.

Spiceball Park – Repairs have been undertaken on the ramp surface.

Moorfields Park – A new accessible roundabout has been ordered for the play area, and will be installed by the Summer School Holidays.

Howard Road Play Area – The surfacing underneath the aerial runway needs replacing. Due to the indicated costs this work will need to be formally tendered.

The Rangers have played a valuable role in supporting the Council's event programme so far this year.

Fencing / Bench Repairs Update

Bridge Street Park – The rangers have now removed the old rotten wooden fence following the installation of the new metal fence.

Peoples Park – Timber fencing refurbishment continues, with the Probation Service.

Peoples Park – The Probation Service has also started to refurbish the park benches, and the standard of work they are undertaking is excellent.

Cleansing Service Update

Facility Cleaning – Following the end of the football usage the pavilions are being deep cleaned in readiness for next season.

The In-house team are performing well, keeping our facilities clean for public use and have assisted with cleaning at our events.

Parks & Open Spaces Cleansing – The service provided by Cherwell District Council is being delivered in line with the Service Level agreement.

Café Operator Update

Following the recent advertisement for a new operator, viewings and interviews were held with interested parties.

Four organisations submitted formal business plans for evaluation. Following the outcome of the evaluation a lease has been offered, accepted and signed by the winner Karen Smith, securing a new operator for an initial term until 31st March 2025.

Her planned re-opening date is the 11th June 2023.

Financial Effects & Risk Assessment

There are no risks arising from these items and all financial effects can be contained within existing budgets.

Recommendations

The Committee is invited to **RESOLVE**:

- To note the Parks and Cemeteries Service Update.
- To note the 4th Corner Landscape Contract Update.
- To note the Ranger Service / Play Area Update.
- To note the Fencing / Bench Repair Update.
- To note the Cleansing Service Update.
- To note the Café Operator Update.

It was also **RESOLVED** by the chairmen and agreed by the committee that the Director of Environment bring a future report to the committee regarding the grass maintenance schedule and opportunities to improve biodiversity within our Parks and Open Spaces.

GS.9/23

Customer Relationship Management and Booking Software Update

Members requested that officers look into ways to implement much required modernisation to our systems, by way of tendering for a CRM (Customer Relationship Management) software package, and events booking system that will begin to address the current issues faced by The Council and its Officers, in relation to the communication and promotion to residents, of events and facilities, in order to create ease of access.

After sourcing feedback from officers within our service areas and operations, along with councillor representation, a set of key objectives were identified that inform the initial pitch to potential software providers.

These are as follows:

- Improve communication and engagement with Residents and stakeholders.
- Streamline reporting processes.
- Provide a cohesive and simple booking system for Events, facilities and the Town Hall.

Several software providers were contacted to advise and propose solutions with varying results. And after much consideration and consultation with both members and officers it was agreed to enlist the services of Abavus Ltd to provide a CRM software and Mobile App, and that Bookteq would handle the bookings of both the Town Hall and Sports Facilities.

My Banbury Customer Portal / App - Abavus

The Solution proposed by Abavus is a modular cloud-based system which would be accessed through the current Town Council website as well as a downloadable mobile app. Features of the system include -

The software comprises of the following –

Customer Portal – Front facing web portal where residents can;

- Register an account
- Report issues (Service Requests)
- Make enquiries
- Allow “Pin in Map” location of issues
- Track progress of requests and enquiries
- Find out more information about our and other authorities services
- Stay up to date with events and other news from BTC
- Highlight entertainment, arts and culture venues within Banbury

Service Desk – Back of house software where officers can;

- Receive reports and enquiries
- Manage and update the status of reports
- Assign reports to specific Officers to handle
- Fully track the lifecycle of a report
- Update residents on outcomes
- Collate and track report data

Mobile App – Mobile version of the Customer Portal that allows access to all the features of the portal but on the go, and will be available on iOS and Android devices. The App will facilitate;

- More accurate location selection, allowing to report on the spot by using “current location”
- A modern, simple and convenient way to engage with Banbury Town Council services

This system is completely modular and all content is built and designed by officers with the initial support of the tech team at Abavus. Once launched any updates and changes can be implemented and tested by Officers, leading to full flexibility on the evolution of both the App and Customer Portal.

Booking System - Bookteq

The solution proposed by Bookteq is an online booking system that will handle both facilities and sports bookings for the Council. Bookteq is a cloud-based booking system that enables simplified facilities management, detailed reporting, and a smooth customer experience. The tool will be accessed by links within the Council's website as well as customisable pop-up Widgets for quick and easy booking. Links will also be added to the mobile app to enable all round access.

Next Steps – Roll out / Launch

Customer Portal / App

Officers along with the contract manager from Abavus have rigorously tested both the App and the Customer Portal and have proposed the following plan for launching the platform –

- 30th May – Silent launch. The Service Desk will be available to officers to begin logging requests and enquiries, allowing time to tweak forms and trouble shoot in a safe environment.
- 6th June – Soft “Go Live”.
- 12th June – Silent Launch. The Customer Portal will be listed on the Council's website and enable residents to begin registering accounts and report issues. It will also allow for officers to trouble shoot any potential issues before press releases / announcement of platform.
- 3rd July – Full Go Live – Co-ordinated press release / marketing schedule, and public launch of the App and Customer Portal to follow.

Facilities Booking Tool

Having worked with representatives from Bookteq, our catalogue of facilities has been inputted into their system, along with prices to reflect our fees & charges for 2023/34.

Sports pitch bookings will operate in a similar manner to how they are currently handled by officers, allowing a smooth transition to self-service bookings from our League teams. This should facilitate priority booking to our long-standing league teams. The proposed timeline for launch is as follows –

- 5th June – Town Hall Bookings go live
- 10th July – Sports Facilities go live

Recommendations – General Services Committee

The Committee is invited to **RESOLVE:**

- To Note the Booking, Customer Relationship Management, Reporting & Mobile Application Update.
- To Approve the suggested “Go Live” date of 3rd July 2023.
- To Authorise that officers in conjunction with selected members meet to agree a marketing plan for the public launch of the CRM Software and Mobile App.
- To Approve the suggested “Go Live” Schedule for the booking system, as detailed in section 8.2.

The meeting ended at 7.30pm