

GENERAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the General Services Committee held at 6.30pm on Tuesday, 12 December 2023 in the Town Hall, Banbury.

Present: Councillor Colegrave (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors: Ayers, Biegel, Bishop, Bunce, Cherry, Donaldson, Hussain, and Mears.

Alternate Members: Councillor Mallon for Councillor Phillips

Officers: Mark Hassall (Town Clerk & RFO)
Paul Almond (Director of Environment)
Jackie Chacha (Marketing & Communications Manager)

GS.25/23 Apologies for Absence
Councillor Phillips

GS.26/23 Declarations of Interest
None.

GS.27/23 Minutes of the Last Meeting
IT WAS RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 October 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Vice-Chairman.

GS.28/23 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 27 November 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 remain within projected costs, recruitment of a cleaner is underway.
- Planned cemetery works include roof repairs at Southam Road depot and tree works on poplars at Southam and driveway footpath repairs.
- Timing of invoicing for grounds maintenance works impacted by timing of November invoicing across Parks, seasonality of football pitch works and Horton View. Timing of Ezee Trees software install into Q4 £10k. Preparation works and seeding on the wildflower meadow in Spiceball has started £10k. Electric Vehicle charging at Southam Road timing for Q4 £8k. CCTV install has been completed and awaits invoice £6k.
- Contract has been completed for a two-year lease of cricket pitch facilities at Hanwell Fields, and investment in machinery purchase will now be undertaken.
- Timing of capital works at PDP aerial runway and Easington link path moved to Q4, with Hillview play area refurb, walled garden and municipal compost bay works earmarked for 2024 delivery.

Underspends on Resources Committee also principally

- Corporate, Central Administration and Civic continue to be well controlled, with cost under budget.
- Town Council Events are currently within budget parameters.
- Other services to the Public include timing of small grants (including a Warm Welcome grant scheme), and invoicing of Christmas Lighting scheme. Woodgreen Open Air Pool operating subsidy has been provided for, subject to a review meeting between CDC officers and the Woodgreen Pool Working Party in the new year.
- Other Costs & Income includes increased interest income in line with changes to Bank of England base rate.

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.

GS.29/23 **IT WAS RESOLVED** to receive and note the Income and Expenditure report.

GS.30/23 **Revised & Draft Revenue Estimates**

COMMENTARY ON THE ESTIMATES

A Summary of the revised estimates for 2023/24 and draft estimates 2024/25 is attached in **Appendix 1** together with a full copy of the Estimates (2024/25).

The estimates included income from fees and charges, which for 2024/25 currently remain unchanged from this year, subject to receipt of guidance from Members.

The estimates for 2024/25 have been set based on a 2% rise in precept, and a rise of 2% in households in the town due to general housing growth. A 5.0% inflation rise in salaries and contract costs have been assumed, or greater where specified.

The following comments on the estimates are materially relevant:

GENERAL SERVICES

COST CENTRE 101 Litter Control & Cleansing

Contractual costs linked to inflation have risen higher than anticipated in the 23/24 budget.

Cost Centre 103 Southam & Hardwick Cemetery

Increased capital costs associated with depot roof maintenance and insurance costs

Cost Centre 110 Parks and Open Spaces

Investment in wildflower meadow creation across Spiceball, PDP, Saffron Close and Hanwell View. Investment across the play estate maintenance as well as bridge, fence and bench repairs. Cleansing costs associated with expanded public toilet provision.

Cost Centre 114 Park Rangers

Salary increases, accompanied by investment in Southam Road depot alarm system and CCTV.

Cost Centre 120 Football Pitches & Horton View

Increased cricket maintenance equipment purchases if fixed two-year seasonal bookings are secured. Refurbishment of Horton View kitchen and alarm system.

Cost Centre 160 Capital costs

Planned delivery of earmarked landscaping projects in Hillview Play area refurbishment (earmark funding) in 23/24 alongside installation of PDP aerial runway, St Marys Churchyard landscaping, creation of Municipal Compost Bays at Spital Farm. Ongoing works in Peoples Park to improve the Warwick Road entrance, including wall works, and install of a café canopy and metal fencing. Provision of defibrillators throughout the pavilion parks are complemented by installation of link path works in Easington Park.

RESOURCES

Cost Centre 305 Central Administration

Salary costs reflect the expansion of marketing function in 23/24, accompanied by CRM marketing provision.

Cost Centre 310 Town Council Events

Planning town event in 24/25 to replace the Coronation event of 23/24. Specific resources reduced to match an anticipated fall in sponsorship income.

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

Utility costs changes from a new fixed priced energy contract in 23/24. Roof repair costs at the Town Hall, with anticipated remedial repainting required in the spring on 2024. 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 in 24/25. Further investment in an expanded lights projection scheme to cover Armistice, Christmas and the start of 2024. Ongoing subsidy of operation costs for Woodgreen Outdoor Pool, alongside increased full election costs in 2024, as advised by Cherwell District Council.

Cost Centre 320 Other Costs and Income

Increased interest income in 23/24 projected to grow in 24/25, supported by increased precept income.

Financial Effects and Risk Assessment

The overall proposals are felt to reflect a satisfactory basis for the Council to discharge its commitments for 2024/25. They include some key changes which will facilitate increased activity in certain service areas.

Consideration of this report falls within the provision of Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and Members affected by those provisions should declare accordingly and refrain from voting.

GS.31/23 IT WAS RESOLVED TO:

- To approve the revised estimates for 2023/24 as now submitted; and
- Refer the draft estimates for 2024/25, together with any comments, to Full Council for approval.

GS.32/23 Parks and Cemeteries Monitoring Report

The team are up to date with the scheduled work.

Mowing has now stopped, machines will now be serviced in preparation for next season.

Staff continue to be busy with burial duties.

Spring bulb planting in the annual beds is now complete.

The community bulb planting day on the 1st November in People's Park was a great success 32000 bulbs were planted by volunteers from Banbury Rotary Club and Students from Banbury and Bicester College. The team worked with and organised the day to ensure the volunteers could complete the planting of 16000 purple crocus and 16000 snow drops on the day. As well as providing a wonderful spring splash of colour, the crocus bulbs will also provide a reminder to support Rotary in its efforts to totally eradicate the (literally crippling) disease of polio from planet Earth!

Autumn Maintenance of the bowling green was completed and is now closed down for the winter.

The team continue to prepare the football pitches for play through undertaking weekly inspections and line marking.

4th Corner Landscape Contract Update

The contractor has now finished mowing for the winter, and we have retained one of the scheduled cuts for March 2024 to ensure we get off to a good start next growing season.

Work has started on winter pruning of shrubs and hedges.

Bulb planting in the ornamental beds is complete.

Monthly aeration operations are scheduled in for sports pitches, as conditions allow.

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

Banbury Urban Orchard - Update

I am pleased to inform the committee all the fruit trees have been allocated for planting to local volunteers from local schools, residents and members of Banbury Rotary Club.

Julia O'Shea the Councils Landscape Officer has done a great job of project managing this initiative, and is busy working with the community organising planting sessions to make sure the fruit trees are in the ground before the end of the planting season.

The volunteers have not only agreed to plant but will continue to monitor and care for the trees until establishment.

Wild Flower Meadow Creation

Officers have issued the orders to create the wildflower meadows at the following sites:

- Spiceball Park
- Princess Diana Park
- Saffron Close
- Hanwell View Park

Work is underway at Spiceball Park, with Princess Diana Park, and Saffron Close to follow.

Work on the meadow at Hanwell View Park will only be undertaken when the land transfer has taken place from the developer.

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 independent annual inspections of our play areas have now been completed, we are awaiting the final report.

The play area refurbishments at Spiceball Park have now been completed, New inclusive roundabout has now been installed.

The Rangers assisted and worked supporting the Council's recent events programme.

Cleansing Service Update

Facility Cleaning – We are still out to recruitment for the vacant cleaner position.

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

Facility Management Update

Southam Road Cemetery Depot – New CCTV and alarm system has now been installed.

Peoples Park – Quotations have now been received for the installation of an extending canopy for the café, once permissions have been checked with planning an order for installation can be placed.

Parks Lighting

Following a review of lighting by Oxfordshire County Council, they have made the decision not to maintain and service any lighting that is not on the adopted highway.

This means that the responsibility for inspecting and repairing lighting the lighting columns in People's Park, Princess Diana Park and Moorfields Park will now be the full responsibility of Banbury Town Council.

The unmetered supply of electric has now transferred directly to our account. There has been a number of structural failures of the columns in People's Park, so priority was given to undertaking a condition survey of the columns in this Park.

The report has highlighted that six columns require immediate replacement, and an order has been placed for these units to be replaced with new columns including LED lighting heads. The Contractor has indicated 10-12 weeks to take delivery of the new columns.

Due to the importance of lighting for safety of park users in the evenings and our ambition to reduce energy use, these emergency works should be seen as phase one.

Officers recommend that following the phase one works, due to the fact that all the other columns in People's Park are of the same age and coming to the end of their natural life, that all units are replaced for new LED columns in 24/25.

Also recommended is that condition surveys are undertaken for our other parks, the findings can then form a phased programme of works to improve safety for users and reduce the Council's energy usage.

Sports Facility Update

Cricket – The Council has received a request to provide a facility for a cricket academy by a local charity Al Medina 313. An initial two season licence has been agreed and signed for cricket for the team to be based at Hanwell Fields Sports Ground starting in April 2024.

Tennis – The Council has been successful in securing a grant from the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) to refurbish the tennis courts in People's Park. The grant of £10,000 will include cleaning and painting the courts, installing key code entry system for users to book the courts for free. In addition, the LTA will be helping the development of tennis in Banbury by providing drop in sessions run by a professional tennis coach in an aim to target more people taking up the sport.

Christmas Light Update

Following the dress rehearsal light switch-on, I am pleased to inform Members of the Committee that switch-on night was a great success with 100% of the lighting units illuminating at 5:00pm.

Financial Effects & Risk Assessment

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

Recommendations

It was then **RESOLVED** to:

- To note the Parks and Cemeteries Service Update.
- To note the 4th Corner Landscape Contract Update.
- To note the Banbury Urban Orchard Update.
- To note the Wild Flower Creation Scheme.
- To note the Ranger Service / Play Area Update.
- To note the Cleansing Service Update.
- To note the Facility Management Update.
- To approve the recommendations for Lighting in Parks.
- To note the Sports Facility Update.
- To note the Christmas Light Update.

It was AGREED unanimously to approve the recommendations for Lighting in Parks.

The meeting ended at 7.30pm