

RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Resources Committee held at 6.30pm on Tuesday, 13 June 2023 in the Town Hall, Banbury.

Present: Councillor Mallon (Chairman)
Councillors: Ayers, Hussain, Kilsby, Reeves, Richards, Strangwood and Tohill-Martin.

Alternate Members: Cllr Richards for Cllr Biegel

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

R.4/23 Apologies for Absence
Cllr Biegel

R.5/23 Declarations of Interest
None

R.6/23 Minutes of the last Meeting
IT WAS RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting held on 28 March and 16 May 2023 be approved as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

R.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.

IT WAS AGREED by the chairman to authorise officers to investigate opportunities for light show projections for Remembrance Day, Christmas Lights switch on as well as New Year's.

IT WAS ALSO AGREED to authorise officers to investigate into improved LED lighting for the Banbury Cross Monument and Fine Lady statue, with consideration to the ecological impacts.

R.8/23 Internal Audit Report 2022/23

The Committee considered a report prepared by the Town Clerk & RFO.

Background

The Town Council has an arrangement with Auditing Solutions Ltd. who provides Internal Audit Services to a number of Local Councils nationally. The Internal Auditor plans visits over a three-year cycle and examines different aspects of the Council's financial operations.

The Internal Auditor work was undertaken on 5th October 2022, 16th February 2023 and 26th April 2023. This report contains observations made.

Comments

The Auditor concluded that, on the basis of the programme of work undertaken, the Council has maintained adequate and effective internal control arrangements during the year. In the areas examined, no major issues or concerns have been identified and it is considered the Clerk and staff continue to operate generally effective control procedures in each relevant area. The Internal Auditors have completed and signed the 'Annual Internal Audit Report' in the year's Annual Governance and Accountability Return, having concluded that, in all significant respects, the control objectives set out in that report were being achieved throughout the financial year to a standard adequate to meet the needs of the Council.

The areas of review included:

- Accounting records and bank reconciliations,
- Corporate Governance,
- Review of Expenditure,
- Assessment and Management of Risk,
- Precept Determination and Budgetary Control,
- Review of Income,
- Petty Cash,
- Staff Salaries,
- Fixed Asset Registers
- Investment & Loans
- Annual Governance and Accountability Return

Financial Effects and Risk Assessment

None arising from this report. The Council's use of an Internal Auditor provides an independent source of assurance as to the veracity of its financial systems and statements.

It was RESOLVED to receive and note the Internal Audit Report 2022/23

R.9/23 Events Update

The Committee considered a report prepared by the Events Manager detailing the upcoming events calendar as well as looking back on previous events in the 2023 Events cycle.

Past Events

A Taste of Spring – 16 April 2023

This was a very successful event with 60 food and drink traders taking part, selling a good cross section of products, including hot/cold food and drinks, as well as a small number of charity/information stalls. The music stage was repositioned for this event to sit alongside (outside Leport & Co. Solicitors), rather than at the far end, and this worked very well being opposite the set-out tables/chairs and bar traders. Positive feedback was received from traders, and the general public. Weather: Good

Party in the Park – Coronation Celebrations – Sunday 7th May 2023

This was a highly anticipated event, and was structured along similar lines to the Jubilee event in 2022. The layout of the event was based on a live music stage at the far end of Spiceball Park, with food/drink traders along either side, and with fairground attractions and other activities, including Go Karts, Climbing Wall and Face Painting to the rear of the park. Music was performed throughout the event, with the last band to perform being 'The Scalectrics' who have a strong local following, with the lighting of a beacon, a fire performance display and a firework display in the second field bringing the day to a close. There was an excellent response to this event from the general public and traders, with several selling out of stock. Weather: Excellent, we were extremely lucky with this as poor weather on the Saturday/Monday either side of this event.

Inauguration – Tuesday 17th May 2023

The outgoing Mayor Cllr. Jayne Strangwood formally handed over to Cllr. Fiaz Ahmed at the annual Inauguration. This Civil Events Officer, who has co-ordinated the whole process of the mayoral handover, and also managed the Mayoral diary.

Upcoming Events

Armed Forces Day – Saturday 17th June 2023

This year's event will include a tour of the Cold War bunker in the basement of the Town Hall, a performance by the Brize Norton Military Wives Choir, and a display of military vehicles/stands. The event has been well publicised via both social media, and also with signage around the town. Event running times: 10:00-16:00

Town Mayor's Sunday – Sunday 9th July 2023

This fun event will be taking place in People's Park, and will include a wide range of activities, including a dog show, go karting, ferret racing, rock climbing, fairground rides – with food and drink also being available to purchase. Event running times: 11:30-16:30

Banbury Music Mix – Friday 21st July 2023

Plans are well underway for this year's very popular event in Market Place. This will involve performances from five singers/bands, with a range of food and drink available to purchase from traders who have attended our food fair events. I am looking in the possibility of a cup reuse scheme for drinks traders, however the cups used last year had a comparatively low return rate due to being event branded. Event has been promoted on social media, and which will have an increasing presence as we get nearer to the event. Event running times: 17:30-22:30

Banbury Food & Drink Festival – Sunday 20th August 2023

Following the success of A Taste of Spring earlier in the year, this promises to be a great event with around 90 food/drinks stalls planned, as well other attractions, in both Market Place and also around the roundabout. We will also be repeating the Cookery Demonstration Theatre which proved to be very popular last year. Event running times: 10:30-16:30

Emergency Services Day – Saturday 2nd September

This popular event will be taking place again Spiceball Park, to educate the general public in how to use the emergency services, and basic life-saving skills. Emergency Services vehicles will also be available for the public to view close up – this will be especially popular with the younger members of our community.

Banbury Canal Festival – Saturday 30th September & Sunday 1st October 2023

Following the success of last year, this will again be a two-day event across the weekend, with many of same elements as last year returning. As well as the towpath itself, we will again make use of the car parking areas around The Mill Arts Centre, North Car Park 2 and Bridge Street Park. This will very much be themed as a family event, with attractions and interest for all age groups. We will again be utilising the North Car Park 2 (below Lidl), and we will also try to encourage more visitors to make use of Bridge Street Park slightly further along the event area. We are working closely however with all organisations involved in order to ensure a well-co-ordinated event. Event running times: 10:30-16:30 on both days.

Remembrance Sunday – 13 November 2022

A successful event took place to mark Remembrance Sunday. All elements of the normal event took place, including a parade, leaving from the Town Hall; a Church service at St Mary's Church and a wreath laying ceremony at the War Memorial in People's Park; along with a reception for invited guests at the Town Hall afterwards. Feedback was received from the Military that they may prefer to be at the War Memorial for 11, rather than in the church, but this was later withdrawn at a review meeting.

Christmas Lights Switch On – Sunday 26th November

This event will once again follow on from the Victorian Christmas Market, and we will have a Santa's grotto, music stage, and fireworks to bring this year's events season to a close. It worked very well last year to move the stage further down Bridge Street, in order to maximise the view for all and so we will be looking to repeat this, although we will be looking to reposition one of the larger fairground rides. Event running times: 11:00-18:00

Financial Effects & Risk Assessment

For 2022-2023 the total budget within the events cost code of 310 (minus salaries) was £93,397. At present £89,692 has been spent, with no further events left to deliver. The remaining money will be used for updating and maintaining events equipment, as per the budget 2022-2023.

Financial effects for events to be delivered in 2023 are all outlined in proposed budgets for 2023-2024, as part of the budget setting process.

It was RESOLVED to receive and note the Events Update Report

R.10/23 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

It was RESOLVED to receive and note the Customer Relationship Management and Booking Software Update.

The meeting ended at 6.55pm

