

GENERAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the General Services Committee held at 6.30pm on Tuesday, 17 October 2023 in the Town Hall, Banbury.

Present: Councillor Phillips (Chairman)
Councillors: Ahmed, Ayers, Biegel, Cherry, Ilott, Mears, Richards.

Alternate
Members: Councillor Ahmed, Councillor Ilott

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

GS.17/23 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Colegrave
Councillor Bunce
Councillor Bishop
Councillor Hussain

GS.18/23 Declarations of Interest

None.

GS.19/23 Minutes of the Last Meeting

IT WAS RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 August 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

GS.20/23 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 06 October 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

- Income across cemeteries contains seasonal impact, including a trend of reduced Exclusive Right of Burial uptake. Rental terms of buildings at Hardwick Hill remain outstanding.
- Whilst staffing costs are currently below budget across the committee, mainly due to timing and vacancies, when including the impact of YTD anticipated nationally agreed pay rises, they are estimated as £7k over budget YTD.
- Computer software to support play equipment and grounds maintenance monitoring.
- In partnership with CDC, landscaping and install of round benches at Moorfields and Hill View parks.
- Underspend in arboriculture is anticipated to be timing related only.
- Timing of playground and landscape software monitoring programmes offset by unspent earmark reserve release.

- Timing of invoicing for grounds maintenance works impacted by seasonality.
- Chemical application retreat is currently being finalised and accompanied by spot strimming as required.
- Floral sponsorship paid to CDC is awaiting invoice following retirement of displays.

Underspends on Resources Committee also principally

- Reduced Central Admin costs including salaries YTD.
- Staffing costs are currently over budget £2k across the committee, mainly due to recruitment, when including the impact of YTD anticipated nationally agreed pay rises, they estimated as £10k over budget, excluding the impact of the expanded marketing role currently being advertised.
- Town Council Events income includes sponsorship across events and are ahead of budget, with costs managed within planned budgets.
- Other Costs & Income includes increased interest income, timing of which is delayed due to transfer from Santander of interest earned to-date (£40k). Costs associated with improvements the heating efficiency at the town hall will be met from earmarked reserves. Increased Town Hall maintenance costs relate to roof repairs undertaken ahead of the onset of winter.

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.21/23 **IT WAS RESOLVED** to receive and note the Income and Expenditure report.

GS.22/23 **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 214/25 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 following the expiry of the current 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 full election costs in 2024.

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 were felt to reflect a satisfactory basis for the Council to discharge its commitments for the remainder of 2023/24 and for 2024/25. They include some key changes which will facilitate increased activity in certain service areas.

The revised estimates for the current year maintain expenditure within the bottom line precept level approved at Budget Council in January 2023.

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.23/23 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 the Grants and Budget Sub-Committee for further consideration.

GS.24/23 Parks and Cemeteries Monitoring Report

The team are up to date with the scheduled work.

Mowing is still ongoing within the Park, Cemeteries and St Marys Churchyard. Staff continue to be busy with burial duties.

We have taken delivery of the spring bedding and team have started planting the annual beds.

Bulbs have been ordered and the community planting day for a mix of purple crocus and snow drops in People's Park is being organised for November. Volunteers from Banbury Rotary Club, schools and Banbury College have been invited to undertake part. The bulbs are to be planted along the southern border to provide an early floral display, prior to the wild meadow growth in spring.

Autumn Maintenance of the bowling green will be undertaken in the next two weeks to close the green down for the winter.

The football season is underway, the team are undertaking weekly inspections and line marking.

4th Corner Landscape Contract Update

The contractor continues with mowing and is operating within scheduled cuts. They are currently on cut 9 for 23/24 season.

Weed growth on roadside channels has been treated, there are some areas that a revisit has been requested by the Council's Landscape Officer.

In light of the changing weather conditions, causing summer flushes of weed growth provision has been made within next year's budget for an additional weed treatment mid-summer.

Shrub border and hedge maintenance is slightly behind schedule, they have indicated this will be rectified by the end of October.

Annual Bedding is due for delivery on the 16th October, the team are currently preparing beds for planting.

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

Following the motion passed at April's full Council:

To ensure we meet our environmental targets: this council will undertake research to find suitable areas within the town to plant fruit trees. Not only will this help wildlife and the environment, but it will also help diversify our tree estate as well providing healthy snacks for our residents."

The fruit trees and planting sundries have been sourced.

The community groups have been contacted to participate in planting and volunteer to be tree wardens to monitor and care for the trees until establishment. The planting is planned to take place in November.

The grant application made to The Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment was unsuccessful. As the scheme offers environmental benefit across the town a lot of work has gone into the planning and the costs can be met within the existing budget, the project is still on track to be delivered.

Wild Flower Meadow Creation

Following the Motion passed at June's full Council:

This council, therefore, moves that it will carry out a review to identify suitable sites across Banbury for further biodiversification through rewilding or planting of wildflowers, including central reservations and road verges, and it will liaise with Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council where required to ensure that that goal is realised wherever possible."

Officers have completed the analysis of sites where there are opportunities for creation of wildflower meadows would be appropriate, sites identified are:

- Spiceball Park
- Princess Diana Park
- Saffron Close
- Hanwell View - Park and POS Southam Road

Following investigation and advice from others, who have successfully created wild flower meadows on improved grass land (grassland with little or low diversity of flowering plant species) there is a recommended process which needs to be followed if an increase in biodiversity is to be achieved over a number of years.

The key operations are:

- a) Tightly mow areas to 5cm and remove arisings to prevent nutrients enriching the soil.
- b) Harrow the ground to open up the sward, creating 50% bare ground.
- c) Sow yellow rattle seed which naturally hosts upon and reduces competing dominant grasses.
- d) Roll the area to ensure seed makes good contact with the soil.
- e) Following year 1 flowering a cut and collect.

Quotations received to undertake these works to create the wild flower meadows in the locations indicated which can be met within the budget. It is recommended that this biodiversity project to create wild flower meadows be approved for delivery 23/24.

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 been ordered and is due to be undertaken by the end of October.

Play Area refurbishments:

- a) Spiceball Park – New inclusive roundabout, replacement spinner and skate ramp repairs have been ordered.
- b) Moorfield Park – A new accessible roundabout was installed in time for the Summer School Holidays.
- c) Peoples Park – Repair to the four-way rocker has been undertaken, new bins have been installed and paths have been resurfaced.

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

Park Furniture Update

Spiceball Park – A long section of timber post and rail fence adjacent to Concorde Avenue has been repaired.

Moorfield Park & Hill View Park – New Communal seats installed.

Peoples Park – The Probation Service have completed the refurbishment of the park picnic tables and been clearing the walled garden.

Princess Diana, Moorfields & Spiceball Parks - New Solar benches were installed by Cherwell District Council, unfortunately, the unit at Princess Diana Park was vandalised within 24 hours and had to be removed for health and safety reasons.

Peoples Park - Table top chess boards have been ordered and will be installed on delivery by the ranger team.

Cleansing Service Update

Facility Cleaning – We are currently 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 – Seeking quotations for work place EV Charging points installation.

Southam Road Cemetery Depot – Seeking quotations for roof repair.

Southam Road Cemetery Depot – Seeking quotations for improved CCTV and alarm system.

Peoples Park – Seeking quotations for the installation of CCTV system covering the Café & Pavilion Building.

Highlands Road Bus shelter repairs/refurbishment has been ordered.

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 approve the Wild Flower Creation Scheme.
- To note the Ranger Service / Play Area Update.
- To note the Park Furniture Update.
- To note the Cleansing Service Update.
- To note the Facility Management Update.

It was AGREED to receive and note the Parks and Open Space report.

It was AGREED to approve the Wild Flower Creation Scheme

The meeting ended at 7.24pm