

GENERAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the General Services Committee held at 6.30pm on Tuesday, 17 December 2024 in the Town Hall, Banbury.

Present: Councillor Richards (Chair)
Councillors: Elugwu and Hodgson.

Alternate
Members: Councillor Harwood (for Councillor Strangwood)

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

GS.22/24 Apologies for Absence
Councillor Strangwood

GS.23/24 Declarations of Interest
None.

GS.24/24 Minutes of the Last Meeting

IT WAS RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting held on 08 October 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

GS.25/24 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 05 December 2024.

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 and are in a good position overall.

General Services variances were principally

- ◆ Cleansing charges to Cherwell District Council (CDC) are paid annually in full in March.
- ◆ Staffing costs remain within budget, in line with annual salary increases agreed with trade unions.
- ◆ Planned roof repairs at Southam Road depot completed and fibreglass burial chambers purchased. Offset by timing of headstone beam installation, annual BACS software license and tree works.
- ◆ Replacement light columns have been installed in People's Park, the beginning of a wider replacement programme across the estate, particularly PDP. Retaining wall works at Longelandes Way planned.
- ◆ Hanwell View MUGA and Public Open Space (POS) has been transferred, along with S106 contribution, to be recognised over the next 15 years of maintenance. Reflooring of Horton View Sports pavilion has been undertaken in showers and main hall.
- ◆ Inspection of eleven MUGA hardstanding and six tennis courts at Horton View is currently being undertaken in order to inform a report by officers to members early in 2025.
- ◆ Assessment and purchase of mowers and fleet vehicles is currently underway.

- ♦ Eight new green roofed bus shelters will be installed by Clear Channel during January 2025 across a number of arterial entry roads into Banbury.

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

GS.26/24 Revised & Draft Revenue Estimates

The Committee considered a report of the Town Clerk & RFO seeking approval of the revised estimates for 2024/25 and consideration of the draft estimates for 2025/26. The estimates included income from fees and charges, which for 2025/26 currently remained unchanged from the current year, subject to receipt of guidance from Members. The estimates for 2025/26 had been set based on a 2% rise in precept, and a rise of 1.1% in households in the town due to general housing growth. A 4.0% inflation rise in salaries and contract costs had been assumed, or greater where specified.

The following comments on the estimates as they related to this committee were materially relevant:

COST CENTRE 101 Litter Control & Cleansing

Contractual costs with Cherwell District Council linked to forecast inflation in 25/26.

Cost Centre 103 Southam & Hardwick Cemetery

Increased capital costs associated with purchase of new grounds maintenance machinery in 25/26. Memorial beams installed in prior year, and remedial fire protection measures undertaken.

Cost Centre 110 Parks and Open Spaces

Ongoing 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. Lighting column upgrade across Princess Diana Park in 25/26, following investment in People's Park during 24/25. Increased weed management and chemical application on streets in 25/26.

Cost Centre 114 Park Rangers

Salary increases, accompanied by £150k investment in zero emission electric vehicle replacement programme, funded by earmarked reserves.

Cost Centre 120 Football Pitches & Horton View

Refurbishment of Horton View flooring and showers undertaken in 24/25. Investment in grounds maintenance equipment undertaken in 24/25. Second of two-year cricket lease at Hanwell Fields being completed in 25/26.

Cost Centre 160 Capital costs

Planned delivery of earmarked landscaping projects in St Marys Churchyard landscaping, creation of Municipal Compost Bays at Spital Farm. Earmarked reserves to progress refurbishment of MUGAs and tennis courts subject to condition assessment undertaken early in 2025.

IT WAS RESOLVED

That the Committees refer the draft estimates for 2025/26 to the Full Council.

GS.27/24 Parks and Cemeteries Service

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Environment providing an update for Members on:

Parks & Cemeteries Team.
4th Corner Landscape Contract.
Wild Flower Creation.
Ranger Service / Play Areas.
Sports Surface
Cleansing Service.
Parks Lighting.
PlayZone Schemes.
Hardwick Hill Cemetery Extension

Parks & Cemeteries Team

The team are up to date with all scheduled work.

The weekly preparation of the football pitches is being undertaken by the team, new line markers and paint should help improve the quality and efficiency of the operation, all team members have received training on the new equipment.

Leaf removal has been undertaken at all sites and is now complete.

All the spring bedding has now been planted.

Burial duties in our Cemeteries has delivered in line with bookings despite the problems experienced with the extreme inclement weather.

The team have completed all hedge works and are about to undertake the winter prune of all shrubs.

All existing Allotment tenants have now been invoiced for next year's rents.

4th Corner Landscape Contract

The initial term of the Grounds Maintenance Contract with 4th Corner Landscapes Ltd is due to end on 31st March 2025. There is provision within the contract conditions to extend the contract by a further period of up to five years. Initial meetings have taken place to discuss the options and to negotiate the period of any contract extension period. Areas being reviewed are:

- Staffing Levels
- Machinery & Equipment
- Routes Programmes and Reporting
- Training
- Environmental Improvements
- Green Waste Recycling (Composting/Mulching)
- Community Social Value
- Inflation costs and contract rates uplift
- Contract Performance Meetings

4th Corner, continue to experience some difficulties with staff resources, which has led to some of the scheduled work not been undertaken in-line with the programme.

Delays have been identified on the shrub and hedge works schedule.

4th Corner are focused on recovering the position on the shrub and hedge works.

The Council's Landscape Officer continues to closely monitor operations and work with the contractor to ensure services are delivered in line with the specification and programme of works.

Wild Flower Creation

Despite the inclement weather, the contractor managed to sow the yellow rattle seed at all sites by the end of October. Sites where seed has been sown are:

- Spiceball Park
- Princess Diana Park
- Crouch Hill
- Saffron Close

Ranger Service / Play Area Update

The Park Ranger Team continue to carry out weekly visual Health & Safety inspections formally recording utilising the new mobile PSS Live software package.

The independent annual Inspections report has now been completed, the rangers are now working through the findings and undertaking the identified repairs in priority order.

The team have assisted the events team in the preparation and attendance at the Autumn and Winter programme of events.

Sports Surface Update

An independent assessment of the MUGA surfaces has been commissioned, a detailed report will be brought to future committee once the reports are received.

An independent assessment of the Tennis Courts at Horton View has been commissioned, a detailed report will be brought to future committee once the reports are received.

Cleansing Service Update

Cleaning of public toilets is ongoing, no problems to report.

Weekly cleaning of all Pavilions is now in place for the rest of the football season, weekly cleans following fixtures is now in place.

Parks & Open Spaces Cleansing – The service provided by Cherwell District Council is being delivered in line with the Service Level agreement, no issues to report.

Parks Lighting Update

The replacement of all lighting columns at People's Park is now completed. Repairs to the MUGA Lighting at People's Park, Merton Street and Moorfields Park have been ordered.

The costs for the installation of an additional 5 lighting columns on the path at Princess Diana Park has been received and will be ordered for completion before the PlayZone is installed 2025.

PlayZone Scheme Update

The Council is still waiting for confirmation of the funding agreement from Cherwell District Council and confirmation of the Planning Application submission dates by the Football Foundations Consultants.

Hardwick Hill Cemetery Extension

The previous planning application approval for the cemetery extension expired before all conditions could be cleared. The two outstanding conditions were:

- a) Following the first phase of archaeological trenching works, the County Archaeologist required a further phase 2 investigation trenching works, before discharging the archaeological survey condition.
- b) Although a draft Layout and Landscape plan was developed, this condition could also not be not be discharged until the condition a) above had been cleared.

The recommendation on the way forward from the Council's Planning Officer is that:

- a) The County Archaeologist at Oxfordshire County Council be contacted and asked to confirm in writing that if the application came up for renewal, would the extent of phase 2 works recommended still be appropriate and required today to clear any required condition.
- b) If the archaeological phase 2 works are confirmed to be the same, only then should Banbury Town Council tender for those works.
- c) Running alongside the tender exercise, a renewal of the Planning Application could be undertaken.
- d) Following the findings of the phase 2 archaeological survey the Layout and landscape detail plan could then be developed.
- e) Completion of these strategic steps would then enable the Council to move forward and work to begin on the development of the site as an extension to Hardwick Hill Cemetery.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to note the report and to approve the recommendation for the Hardwick Hill Cemetery Extension Development as set out above.

The meeting ended at 7.15pm