

GENERAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the General Services Committee held at 6.30pm on Tuesday, 28 August 2023 in the Town Hall, Banbury.

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

Alternate Members: None.

Officers: Paul Almond (Director of Environment)
Martyn Surfleet (Executive Officer)

GS.10/23 Apologies for Absence
None.

GS.11/23 Declarations of Interest
None.

GS.12/23 Minutes of the Last Meeting
IT WAS RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting held on 06 June 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

GS.13/23 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 23 August 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, along with outstanding settlement of rental terms of buildings at Hardwick Hill.
- Whilst staffing costs are currently below budget (£10k) across the committee, mainly due to vacancies, when including the impact of YTD anticipated nationally agreed pay rises, they are estimated as £4k over budget.
- 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.
- Overspend 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.

Underspend on Resources Committee also principally

- Reduced Central Admin costs including salaries.
- 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.
- Town Council Events income includes sponsorship across events and are ahead of budget, with costs incurred in advance but managed within planned budgets. The coronation celebration increased expenditure (net of income) of (£3k) was mainly caused by a £2k overspend incurred on litter disposal. Marginal net overspend on Town Mayors Sunday and Food Fairs are anticipated to be contained within overall event budgets.
- Other Costs & Income includes increased interest income, timing of which is delayed due to transfer from Santander of interest earned to-date (£25k). Costs associated with improvements the heating efficiency at the town hall will be met from earmarked reserves.

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.14/23 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.

Planting in the park days with local school children went ahead on the 14th and 15th of June, despite the extreme temperatures, all schools turned up and they did an amazing job of planting up the beds.

Maintenance of the bowling green has continued over the summer at Horton View, the club have praised the green staff for the standard of maintenance that has been achieved and how well the green has bowled.

The football season is being prepared for. All teams' applications received have been accommodated and facilities have been allocated. Initial line marking and goal post installation has been undertaken in readiness for first games.

4th Corner Landscape Contract Update

Although the contractor experienced some staff vacancies which delayed previous cuts, the 7th cut will be completed by the end of August.

Weed growth has been particularly bad this year with the perfect growing conditions of rainy warm weather. Road channel weed treatment spraying is due to 29th August 2023, which will improve the appearance of the Banbury's street scene.

Sports pitch verti-draining aeration and topdressing works has been undertaken on all football goal mouths in preparation for the start of the playing season.

Shrub border maintenance is on generally on schedule.

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."

Officers met with elected members and a representative of volunteer group BCAG Banbury Trees to agree a project plan for this initiative.

Officers have completed a survey to identify suitable locations across Banbury Town Councils open spaces and have found 65 locations covering all wards across Banbury.

After sourcing the available trees from nurseries, working up scheme costs, a grant application has been made to The Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment.

An assessor has been appointed to review our grant application and she has visited some of the locations.

We are currently awaiting the outcome of our application.

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 RPII (Register of Play Inspectors International Ltd) training for team members was completed in June 2023.

Play Area refurbishment update is:

- a) Princess Diana Park – The play area refurbishment was completed in time for the schools breaking up for the summer. The play area was officially opened by Cllr Martin Phillips on the 18th August 2023.
- b) Spiceball Park – Repairs have been undertaken on the ramp surface.
- c) Moorfield Park – A new accessible roundabout was installed in time for the Summer School Holidays.

The Rangers continue work supporting the Council's event 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 refurbishment of the park benches, and started work on the picnic tables.

Princess Diana, Moorfields & Spiceball Parks - New Solar benches are to be installed.

Peoples Park, a request has been received by the Council for chess tables to be installed in Parks, proposal is to install table top chess boards in the park to gauge demand for this type of activity.

Cleansing Service Update

Facility Cleaning – We currently have a vacancy for a cleaner following the resignation.

The In-house team continue to keep 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.

Further to the motion agreed at full Council, working with Cherwell District Council, additional litter bins have been installed in 4 locations in the Grimsbury Area.

Café Operator Update

The café operator has now been open since June.

Karen appears to be making a success of running the cafe, the food and drink offer is varied and good quality. She has built up a good regular customer base and has attracted a steady trade over the summer.

The café provided a valuable service for events held in the Park like the school planting days in June and Town Mayors Sunday in July.

Sports Pitches Update

The football foundation has launched a grant scheme with aims of:

“revolutionising the state of grass pitches across England. By 2030, we want to ensure grassroots football has 20,000 'good' quality pitches to enjoy”

Grants available are detailed below:

Pitch size	Grant value (per pitch)*
11 v 11	£3,200 per pitch
9 v 9	£2,560 per pitch
Mini soccer (7v7 and 5x5)	£1,920 per pitch

One of the conditions of making an application is that a condition report per pitch has to be undertaken. Officers undertook this Pitch Power survey work and submitted the results to the Grounds Management Association for consideration.

If applications are successful the grant is tapered over a six-year period i.e. *For example, the grant awarded for an 11v11 football pitch that needs enhancing would be £3,200 in year 1 and 2, £2,133 in year 3 and 4 and £1,067 in year 5 and 6.*

We have now received the reports back from the Grounds Management Association which identifies work recommendations required to improve our pitches, which means we should be eligible for the Football Foundation grants.

Applying for the grant could provide significant funding to improve the quality of Town Councils football pitches and mean a reduction in the number of games that have to be called off due to waterlogging.

The recommendation is that members support the work undertaken to date and approve officers making the grant application to the Football Foundation.

Defibrillators – Update

As previously approved by this committee, defibrillators have now been installed on the pavilion buildings at all sports grounds.

Electric Vehicle Charging Points for Fleet and Employee Vehicles

The Government has launched a grant scheme for the installation of Electric Charging points for charging its fleet and employee vehicles

Officers made an application, which has been approved.

To utilise the grant funding, the installation must be complete before December 2023.

Installing EV charging points at Southam Road Depot would ensure the Council has the necessary infrastructure in place to move to electric powered vehicles as the fleet comes up for replacement.

The recommendation is to approve the installation of EV charging points at Southam Road Depot taking advantage of the grant funding awarded.

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 Banbury Urban Orchard Update.
- To note the Ranger Service / Play Area Update.
- To note the Park Furniture Update.
- To note the Cleansing Service Update.
- To note the Café Operator Update.
- To approve the Grant Application to the Football Foundation for Sports Pitch Improvements.
- To note the Defibrillators Update
- To approve the installation of Electric Charging Points at Southam Road Depot.

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

It was AGREED to approve the Grant Application to the Football Foundation for Sports Pitch Improvements.

It was AGREED to approve the installation of Electric Charging Points at Southam Road Depot.

GS.15/23 Bus Shelter Realtime Information and Living Roofs Update

Due to the previous Clear Channel Lease Contract expiring in October 2023, it was suggested that, by way of mutual approval between Banbury Town Council and Clear Channel before the end of October 2022, the contract can only be extended after that time by Deed of Variation.

Clear Channel agreed to the installation of Green Roofs on arterial route bus shelters.

As part of a wider Oxfordshire County Council incentive funding has been made available for the installation of real time information boards to be fitted in and in proximity to our shelters.

A further £10,000 will be invested by Clear Channel in the repainting and refurbishment of the remaining shelter stock to retain and enhance the current provision.

Suggestions for resolution

Clear Channel agreed to the installation of 7 Green Roofs on arterial route bus shelters in spring 2024 with the final location to be proposed by Clear Channel for future installation.

Oxfordshire County Council have agreed to install real time information on near to 20 shelters across the estate, with major interchange boards proposed for Bridge Street, and potentially Banbury station pending additional funding from Chiltern Railways. Installation due for September 2024 pending electrical works commencing W/C 21st August.
The proposed list consists of –

- OXFORD RD O/S ST JOHNS CHURCH
- OXFORD RD O/S MEDICAL CENTRE
- OXFORD RD O/S HORTON HOSPITAL
- OXFORD RD OPP. HORTON HOSPITAL
- BEACONSFIELD RD O/S SHOPS
- BRETCH HILL OPP BRADLEY ARCADE
- CHATSWORTH DRIVE O/S PH
- CHATSWORTH DRIVE OPP. SHOPS
- BANKSIDE ADJ. FARMWAY
- BLOXHAM RD OPP. EASINGTON GARDENS
- MIDDLETON RD O/S TESCO'S DIRECT
- MIDDLETON RD OPP. TESCO'S DIRECT
- OXFORD RD ADJ. GRANGE RD
- BRIDGE STREET O/S DEBENHAMS BUILDING
- BRIDGE ST O/S WILKOS
- CASTLE ST O/S BOLTON RD CAR PARK
- HORTON VIEW O/S NO. 5

Further assessments for suitability of real time information installation on shelters within Horsefair and Bridge street to be conducted by OCC officers and representatives from Clear Channel, with bridge street shelters proposed to be served by a standalone information multi-exchange board outside the old Debenhams site when entering the bus station. This will be twinned with a similar provision in the train station.

Clear Channel in consultation with officers have identified 6 key shelters for refurbishment –

- OXFORD RD O/S MEDICAL CENTRE
- OXFORD RD O/S HORTON HOSPITAL
- BRETCH HILL OPP BRADLEY ARCADE
- CHATSWORTH DRIVE OPP. SHOPS
- MIDDLETON RD O/S TESCO'S DIRECT
- CASTLE ST O/S BOLTON RD CAR PARK

Once agreed a work schedule will be issued.

Financial Effects & Risk Assessment

Clear Channel proposes to invest in the region of a further £126,000 in 8 new 3-bay Living Roof shelters to replace 8 existing locations – across the advertising and non-advertising estate

In addition, Clear Channel will invest a further £10,000 in repainting and refurbishment of the remaining shelter stock.

Oxfordshire County Council to fund installation of Real Time Information on 20 existing arterial route shelters within Banbury.

It was RESOLVED to receive and note the Bus Shelter Realtime Information and Living Roofs Update.

GS.16/23 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.

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

After seeking approval from committee members to implement a phased roll out / launch of the system and app the following milestones were achieved;

- 30th May – Silent launch. The Service Desk was made 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”. Officers began logging all service requests and enquiries on the system.
- 12th June – Silent Launch. The Customer Portal was listed on the Council's website and a dedicated site page was created guiding residents on how to report issues / enquire about services.

- 21st July – Full Go Live – Co-ordinated press release / marketing schedule, and public launch of the App and Customer Portal.

Booking System - Bookteq

Alongside the customer relationship software and app, the timeline for the implementation of the facilities booking system was agreed the following milestones have been achieved;

- 19th June – Officers were given training on the new booking system ready for launch.
- 26th June – Officers began transferring over current confirmed bookings onto the new booking system, as part of a phased transition from current software.
- 21st July – Public launch of the booking system for the Town Hall went live, with dedicated 'Venue Hire' page created on BTC website, as well as linked to the 'My Banbury' app.

The final phase of roll out of the booking system relates to our sports facilities and pavilions. Access to the system will be given to select league teams for the start of the 2023/24 season as part of a phased roll out / testing period to allow teams to learn the new booking process, and allow officers to respond accordingly to any issues that might arise. Once testing has finished the intention is to slowly roll out the system to our other teams one by one.

Uptake and Statistics

Since the launch of the Customer Portal and App officers have been organically adding customers onto the reporting system as and when reports have come in, via the phone and email as well as in person. Now that the service is live with the public we are beginning to see a gradual growth in registered users, as well as a diversification of platforms in which the reports are generated (iPhone, Android and Web Browser). As time goes on we will start to see trends on which route reports are generated and officers will be able to respond in raising awareness for the service to fill any gaps in uptake.

Downloads of the My Banbury App currently stand at (as of 21st August 2023)
Apple – 77
Android – 68

Next Steps – Continued Marketing and Monitoring

As part of the ongoing promotion and monitoring of these new software's further marketing and advertising strategies are needed, to ensure the longevity and success of the App and Customer Portal. So far as part of the launch officers produced in house marketing materials for both social media and our noticeboards as well as a dedicated press release to local news outlets. Presence of promotional materials at Town Council Events will also take place, starting with Music Mix and the next event being the Food and Drink Festival. Advertising leaflets produced in house have also been provided to the Tourist information desk within Banbury Museum & Gallery as well as the Customer Service Desk within Castle Quay. Finally, a sustained and continuous approach to social media promotion is in place with weekly posts highlighting the App and its functionality.

Officers have also explored further ways to promote the services via other means. The following options have been highlighted as potential avenues;

- Radio advertisement / sponsorship – Via Banbury FM, several package options are available with varying price structures and target audiences.
- QR coded external vinyl stickers for our parks and open spaces leading residents to download the app. Priced between 0.92p and 1.03p per sticker.

Both of these options will provide additional far reaching advertisement for the new App and Booking software and will target audiences that are unreachable via the typical social media approach.

It was raised by members that further additional funds over and above the requested £5,000 may be required to ensure the success of the 'My Banbury' app, and that officers should investigate more avenues of marketing for the App and Customer Portal.

IT WAS RESOLVED:

- To Note the Booking, Customer Relationship Management, Reporting & Mobile Application Update.
- To Approve that officers, request additional marketing funds to the sum of £5,000, through the 6+6 budgeting exercise, to further promote and market the 'My Banbury' App and supporting software's

The meeting ended at 7.43pm