

Minutes of the Policy Committee

A meeting of the **Policy Committee** was held on **Monday 11th November 2024 at 19:00hrs** at the **Chamber Room, Bicester Town Council, The Garth, Launton Road, Bicester, Oxon, OX26 6PS.**

Present:

Cllr Paul Wheatley (Chair)
Cllr Alisa Russell (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Tom Beckett
Cllr Sam Holland
Cllr Rachel Mallows
Cllr Nick Mawer
Cllr Chris Pruden (Substitute)
Cllr Jim Webb

In Attendance:

Paul Canning, Deputy Town Clerk
Jodi Clarke, Finance Assistant
Paul Jagers, Bicester Rugby Club
Wendy Cheeseman, Resident of Bicester
Pam Roberts, Resident of Bicester
Brian Welter, Resident of Bicester
Marion Beaver, Resident of Bicester

26/2425 Apologies for Absence

RESOLVED that apologies were received from the following Committee Members with substitutions:

- Cllr Nick Cotter sent Cllr Chris Pruden to Substitute the meeting.
- Cllr Harry Knight
- Cllr Michael Waine

27/2425 Declaration of Interest

RESOLVED that no declaration of interest were received.

28/2425 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED that the Committee **APPROVED** the following minutes:

- **POL03/2425 – Tuesday 8th October 2024 at 19:00hrs**

29/2425 Public Session

RESOLVED that multiple residents attended the public session for different items.

Paul Jagers from the Bicester Rugby Club spoke regarding Item 8 on the agenda. Paul thanked the council for all their work with the rugby Club & willingness to

negotiate with them. Paul also thanked the council for Partnering with Rugby to keep them playing during the issues with Whitelands & expressed that the club is happy to be working alongside the council going forward.

Brain Welter, Pam Roberts & Wendy Cheeseman attended the meeting to show their support for the proposed motion raised by Cllr Beckett.

Wendy Cheeseman had a few questions for Cllr Beckett regarding the proposed motion (these are answered in Item 8 of the minutes):

1. In terms of measuring your carbon emissions, Can I check that you are measuring CO₂E not CO²?
2. Is it the organisation itself measuring (As in the Town Council)?
3. Does the Town Council consider themselves as an anchoring institution?
4. Do you have an adaptation or resilience plan?
5. Committee spoke about having an external audit, did you mean doing a carbon footprint? & did you mean to do that with the base year 2024/2025 as you are talking about getting money to do it in 2025/2026?

Brian Welters expressed how important this motion is to the residents of Bicester, & how much Climate Change is affecting everyone. Mr Welters expressed how the council should be leading by example to make these changes, he explained that the council have a responsibility to do this but the example that comes from it encourages the residents to take action as well.

Pam Roberts explained today was the first day of the conference of the parties which is a worldwide meeting about Climate Change & how to reduce Carbon Emissions, Carbon Dioxide & other gases in the atmosphere. Mrs Roberts expressed that if the motion is approved tonight then Bicester Town Council can work towards achieving the goal of reducing our carbon footprints. There are many residents that are not here tonight that with a bit of encouragement we can get them to take some action.

30/2425 Climate Emergency Resolution – Motion

The Chair handed over to Cllr Beckett to present his motion to the council & public.

Cllr Beckett presented the following: On the 3rd September 2019 Bicester Town Council agreed to a Climate Emergency Resolution by where the council agreed to facilitate the reduction of Carbon Emissions which of course to be able to do this you need to be able to establish how much Carbon Emissions you have. It was set upon this Policy Committee to identify means & opportunities to reduce and eliminate Carbon Emissions, it was taken upon this Committee to investigate a grant pot which will enable carbon reductions schemes.

The Council has done a lot so far with the purchase of electric vehicles, installation of LED light bulbs & done some work on energy efficiency measures across council owned buildings but the council hasn't done a base line assessment, what the council hasn't done is address points i, iii, iv & vii of its climate energy resolution and

therefore this motion is for the Committee to take action on the climate resolution with a particular task of identifying the costs for the council to have an external audit of scope 1,2 & 3 emissions, alongside a list of recommended actions the council could take to reduce those emissions with this investigatory work to happen for the 2025/2026 budgetary period & to include that within the budget.

Cllr Beckett responds to the questions asked in the public session:

1. The assessments which we are looking to do are for carbon emissions as a whole so; CO₂E (Carbon Emissions Equivalent).
2. This motion doesn't address the wider emissions of Bicester but does take steps to address and look at our own emissions & in the essence of the forward plan is to look at how we can also encourage others.
3. Anchoring institution – I'm not sure we can quite define ourselves as an anchoring institution but in the wider sense we are because we are there to look after the long-term health & social welfare of our communities.
4. In terms of a resilience plan, a Climate Change resilience plan I assume. whether we are actually thinking about the flood impacts and the longer-term impacts of climate change on our town, I'm not sure if we have looked at the wider impacts but I know flood risk assessments are done through any developments therefore they are done by proxy through Cherwell District Council and it is something we should consider within local plans and certainly something which Cherwell District Council is considered within it's local plan going forward.
5. I think within this motion it would be to carry out the audit in 2025/2026 and therefore the baseline year would have to be in that year 2025/2026 and your accounting period.

Cllr Beckett expressed how important it is for Bicester Town Council to show leadership when tackling the climate change issues & how it is Bicester Town Council responsibility to show this leadership to the community to encourage them to also take action on climate change.

Cllr Webb did raise a concern about whether the budget facilitates the expenditure for the external audit. The Vice-Chair informed the Committee that £7,000 had been allocated for this.

RESOLVED that the committee **APPROVED** the motion.

This vote was a unanimous vote.

31/2425 Budget

The Vice-Chair thanked the Responsible Finance Officer Helen Pool for all the hard work she has put into the budget for it to be presented to each committee.

Cllr Mawer had a few questions regarding section on the budget, each query will be done on a line-by-line basis with the Vice-Chair answering any queries possible:

- The total estimated expenditure for 2024/2025 for the Policy Committee budget was £63,109.00, the draft budget for 2025/2026 is £136,148.16 so that is more than double. Is that correct?

The Vice-Chair informed the committee that the section they were looking at was for the Projects indirect expenditure, so it is not the total of the Policy Budget just the Projects (110) section.

1013/102 (Inc Civic Miscellaneous/ Civic & Democratic);

- Easter Egg Hunt 2023/2024 & Mayors Lunch 2024/2025 total estimated expenditure for 2024/2025 is £12,000, this seems quite a lot.

The Vice-Chair informed the committee that this code is an income code not an expenditure code.

4031/102 (Modern Gov/ Civic & Democratic);

- Why if there are annual costs is no budget presented?

The Vice-Chair informed the committee that this is because the council is moving away from Modern Gov, so there is no reason to budget an expense.

4159/102 (Elections/ Civic & Democratic);

- We are going to see the Town Council with significant increase to 22 councillors, are we putting aside enough money?

The Vice-Chair informed the committee that £12,000 will be put aside. Concerns were raised that the £12,000 would cover an election if in the 2024/2025 period was almost £12,000, the Vice-Chair commented that the difference would be made up from earmarked reserves.

Cllr Pruden asked Cllr Mawer if they knew whether the cost of the elections is based on the amount of members that get elected? Cllr Mawer was not sure as the process is quite complex.

4161/102 (Civic Mayor Making/ Civic & Democratic);

- Have we been subject to a 37% increase in that charge?

The Vice-Chair explained that they based on the last year 2023/2024 they had seen nearly £1,500 spent, but not sure why this year was less. The Vice-Chair thinks it is more conservative and fairer to budget the same value as 2023/2024.

4163/102 (Civic Service & Parade/ Civic & Democratic);

- £4,000 for the Civic Service & Parade, the estimate expenditure for 2024/2025 is £1,423.00, this is a huge jump to £4,000.

The Vice-Chair explains that if you look at the 'Actual Last Year 23/24 you will see that the expenditure was £3,370, and that it would be good to have some funding for the Civic Service & Parade. The Responsible Finance Officer has tried looking into why this year was so low, whether it is that something was missed, something not purchased or that was bought in previous years.

Cllr Mawer explained that the reason the Civic Service & Parade was changed was to decrease the extra expenditure on road closures.

Cllr Mawer expressed that there are general concerns about the affect of the governments increase in national insurance. The Vice-Chair informed the committee that they have already discussed this with the Responsible Finance Officer, the Vice-Chair gave them the formula to calculate this as it is not an easy process. Staff are still waiting on their increments for the annual increase, nothing has been confirmed, the difference is it will be calculated and if it is material they will come back to the council and the councillors and explain what the difference is, & what the plan to cover the difference is because it cant be avoided but the Responsible Finance Officer is calculating the impact.

4021/105 (Office Phones/ Central Services);

- We've purchased 2 extra phone lines, going up from £2,000 to £3,500 that is correct?

The Vice-Chair explained that they had worked out for this years estimated expenditure was looking to be £3,590. They want to but 2 extra lines and £81.00 added from an accrued bill in 2023/2024 invoices that have come through after year end. Previous years we have spent £3,000.

4024/105 (Subscriptions/ Central Services);

- Any reason why the budget is lower than estimated expenditure for this year by about £2,500?

The Vice-Chair was unsure on the definite reason for this as it could have been down to a one-off invoice but they will ask the Responsible Finance Officer and get back to them.

4040/105 (Website/ Central Services);

- Last Year we spent £435.00, we've spent £156.00 so far in this year but we are budgeting £1,300 for next year. That is quite a considerable increase, is there any reason why?

The Vice-Chair informed the committee that the officers were looking to make some changes to the website.

4057/105 (Audit Fee's/ Central Services);

- Are the Audit Fee's set?

The Vice-Chair confirmed that these are set fee's and are hoping these don't change. The Actuals are around £3,000 but they haven't increased the price in a few years so it could be that they put there charges up, this is why a £4,000 budget has been kept.

The Vice-Chair will ask the Responsible Finance Officer to email the auditor to check for any increases in the fee's for the next financial year.

4169/105 (Newsletter/ Central Services);

- This is for the Garth Gazette, last year was £15,000 but budgeting £20,000?

The Vice-Chair explained to the Committee that there had been an increase due to more household within Bicester and staff costs for the creation of the Newsletter.

1001/106 (Inc-Nais House/ Garth House);

- Is this the amount they pay or NET figure?

The Vice-Chair Informed the Committee that this is what the organisation pay. The Vice-Chair suggested asking the Responsible Finance Officer to do a separate report for the NET figure.

4011/106 (Rates/ Garth House);

- £24,000 for the current year but £10,000 for the following year?

The Vice-Chair would need to speak with the Responsible Finance Officer as the reasoning is complicated, there was no estimate for this year but previous year's show less but no more then £10,000.

4039/106 (Waste Removal/ Garth House);

- Has cost £9,105, budget was £1,250 and there is no budget for next year?

The Vice-Chair confirmed that the waste removal budget should not be here and has been moved but will be viewable in the Environment Committee budget.

4130/106 (Building Security/ Garth House);

- Gone from £1,500 to £11,550?

The Vice-Chair explained that the Town Clerk has a project for next year to change the security system in many places, this because the current ones are old and outdated which includes CCTV.

1006/107 (Inc-Garth Lodge/ Garth Lodge);

- Expected income is less then the budget? Current budget is £13,200 but only getting £11,000 for the year.

The Vice-Chair noticed there was a typo and both the draft budget and expenditure for 24/25 should state £12,200.

1096/108 (Inc-Interest Received/ Corporate Finance);

The Vice-Chair explains that the Town Clerk thinks the investments will be liquidated for the new build. That means it will not have the same amount in the deposit for the whole year, the account will not be emptied in one lump sum so that why it's been budgeted for half of what was received this year in terms of interest.

4305/110 (New Cemetery/ Projects);

- Are we still putting money away for this?

The Vice-Chair explains that they've done a £2,500 increase each year.

Cllr Webb thanks the Vice-Chair & Cllr Mawer for going through and asking the questions that were needed for clarification.

Councillors thanked both the Vice-Chair and the Responsible Finance Officer for the hard work & transparency within the proposed budget.

RESOLVED that the Committee **RECOMMEND** the budget as set out in appendix 1 to go forward to the Finance Committee on the 2nd December 2024 as amended.

This was a unanimous vote.

32/2425 Market Square Lease – Christmas Light Switch On

RESOLVED that the Committee **APPROVED** the sealing of this contract and witnessed as such.

This was a unanimous vote.

Cllr Wheatley & Cllr Mawer both signed the sealing register with Cllr Wheatley sealing the lease.

33/2425 Bicester Rugby Club

The Committee passed their thanks onto the Rugby Club but also to the Town Clerk & Cllr Wheatley for the hard work to resolve the issues that they were faced with.

Cllr Pruden asked if any measures had been put in place to avoid this happening in the future with any users of the councils' sites. The Chair expressed that the Rugby Club and the Town Clerk will work together to avoid further issues.

RESOLVED that the Committee **NOTED** the update and considered the negotiation is now finalized and the Committee **APPROVED** that the Finance Committee is asked to do the same upon review.

This was a unanimous vote.

34/2425 Forward Plan

Personnel Policies were last reviewed in 2019, the Chair asked Cllr Pruden who is the Chair of the Personnel Sub-Committee to review these policies and have them brought back to the Policy Committee once done.

RESOLVED that the Committee **NOTED** the Forward Plan.

35/2425 Date of the Next Meeting

11th February 2025 at 19:00hrs

Close of meeting: 20:14hrs

DRAFT