

Minutes of the Finance Committee

A meeting of the **Finance Committee** was held on **Monday 1st December 2025** at **19:00 hrs** at the **Council Chamber, The Garth, Launton Rd, OX26 6PS**.

Present:

Cllr Alisa Russell (Chairperson)
Cllr Tom Beckett
Cllr Nick Cotter
Cllr Donna Ford
Cllr Rachel Mallows
Cllr Les Sibley
Cllr Paul Wheatley

In Attendance:

Trevor Longfield – Responsible Finance Officer
Chloe Challenger – Civic and Democratic Administrator

17 / Apologies for Absence

2526 RESOLVED that apologies be received from:

- Cllr Jim Webb

18 / Declarations of Interest

2526 RESOLVED that no declarations were received.

19 / Minutes of the Finance Committee

2526 RESOLVED to **CONFIRM** the minutes of the Finance Committee meeting held on:

- **FIN01/2526** held on Thursday 5th June 2025 at 19:00hrs.

20 / Public Session

2526 RESOLVED that no members of the public were present.

21 / Financial Performance Report

2526 RESOLVED that Committee **NOTED** and **REVIEWED** the Income, Expenditure and Variances Report to **Month 7** October 2025.

A concern was raised about the £47,000 spend on Open Spaces (TL was this £471K budget?)

Review of same contract at year end to understand cost incurred during change of contract

Biggest item spend - £415,000 The Garth for play park

Long-term loan – paid to public works board every six months

Confirmation of employee costs

Whitelands café – no income generated – need to review for claiming.

22 / Bank Balances

2526 RESOLVED that Committee **NOTED** and **REVIEWED** the bank balances.

Committee questioned whether access was available to Bank Accounts. RFO advised that recovery of the Lloyds account (£550,000) is in progress but not yet received. Other accounts should be accessible when officers are present.

Councillors requested a review of interest generated, the return on CCLA fund is significantly higher than Barclays, but concern raised that CCLA is share-based and that might not be suitable. Council should maximise returns on funds but require good day-to-day operational service, should follow best advice for best outcome. Council would prefer more ethically-minded/Greener banks but risks of impact on customer operationally. Suggestion made of Nationwide – Mayor to explore this.

23 / Standing Orders and Direct Debits

2526 RESOLVED that the Committee **APPROVED** the RFO stopping Direct Debits and Standing Orders that are no longer appropriate.

Concerns raised over contract with new energy provider signed for three years from April 2026. Supplier was selected with the advice of Utility Aid but more environmentally friendly options should have been considered. RFO advised that contract did not include Whitelands which is still under Cherwell District Council who re-charge the costs to Bicester Town Council.

All future new or stopped Standing Orders and Direct Debits to be reported regularly.

24 / Reserves Report

2526 RESOLVED that the Committee **REVIEWED** and **NOTED** the report.

Noted that £58,000 insurance recoveries for play area added back to the Earmarked Reserves (“EMR”) that that the spend came from. Queries raised over EMRs: Town Centre as money spend on bollards, Open Spaces as suggestion of leasing vehicles and/or staggering purchases (Town Clerk to be consulted).

RFO to review the EMRs to produce clearer explanation of intended uses and reasonableness of the level of reserves.

25 / Charitable Grants

2526 RESOLVED that the Committee **NOTED** the progress and **APPROVED** one of the two recommendations.

The Committee agreed to **REJECT** the Grant to Citizens Advice Bureau. The Committee **DELEGATED** the **APPROVAL** of the small grant to Howe Trust (Wheatley) to the Mayor subject to review of the documents. RFO advised that Bicester Green were taking action to register as a Charity. Concerns were raised that the grant criteria were being restricted to registered charities and that this was not the definition nor past practice.

RFO to provide analysis of Grants, paid and provisionally agreed but still not paid, with a view or re-visiting applications previously rejected due to timing of applications.

26 / Budget and Precept 2026-27

2526 RESOLVED that the Committee **REVIEWED** and **APPROVED** the Budget and Precept for 2026-27.

Budget and Precept recommended for approval by the Full Council at their next meeting.

Concerns raised on the lack of income from Whitelands Café, the precise nature of the legal position between the Café, Bicester Town and Cherwell District Councils.

Concerns raised over salary increase assumptions and training access including apprenticeships.

Concerns also raised over cemetery space – whether it should be provided without additional costs to taxpayers, new cemetery being ashes-only interment and issues around religious requirements and burials.

28 / Internal Audit

2526 RESOLVED that the committee **NOTED** the interim internal audit report.

Councillors expressed concern that Report states that there had been no expenditure over £10,000 when there had been some payments over £100,000 by the time of the audit.

Date of next Meeting: 6th January 2026 at 19:00

CLOSE OF MEETING: 20:34hrs

Note: FIN02 was cancelled and FIN03 was adjourned as non-quorate