

Minutes of the Finance Committee

A meeting of the **Finance Committee** was held on **Wednesday 4th December 2024** at **19:00hrs** at **The Chambers Room, Bicester Town Council, The Garth, Launton Road, Bicester, Oxon, OX26 6PS.**

Present:

- Cllr Alisa Russell (Chair)
- Cllr Nick Cotter
- Cllr Donna Ford
- Cllr Dan Hallett
- Cllr Nick Mawer (Substitute)
- Cllr Chris Pruden (Substitute)
- Cllr Les Sibley
- Cllr Paul Wheatley

Attendance:

- Helen Pool, Responsible Finance Officer
- Jodi Clarke, Finance Assistant

60/2425 Apologies of Absence

RESOLVED that apologies were received from the following committee members:

- Cllr Tom Beckett
- Cllr Sam Holland, sent Cllr Nick Mawer as a substitute.
- Cllr Rachel Mallows, sent Cllr Chris Pruden as a substitute.

61/2425 Declaration of Interest

RESOLVED that no declarations were received.

62/2425 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

UNRESOLVED that the committee did not come to any decision.

The committee agreed that going forward Aged Debtors and Grant Aid will go through a private section on the agendas.

63/2425 Public Session

RESOLVED that no public were present.

A statement from the Vice-Chair at the Bicester Rugby Union Club:

“My apologies that I could not be here in person this evening due to childcare commitments. I have recently taken over the role of Facilities Lead for Bicester RUFC. I am aware that relations between the Club and the Council had become fractious. However, through new relationships, I am delighted that we have been able to build bridges, negotiate a sensible compromise for all parties and have now settled the agreed amount. As a Club, we very much look forward to building a strategic partnership with BTC to secure a long-term home and future for rugby in the town.

We'd also like to note our thanks to the team for their continued support at Whitelands Farm during the recent staffing challenges. Through collaboration, we were able to ensure no rugby activity was affected.”

Councillors **NOTED** the statement from the Vice-Chair, Bicester Rugby Club.

64/2425 Finance Report

RESOLVED that as per Financial Regulation 4.8, the committee **REVIEWED** and **NOTED** the attached Income, Expenditure and Variance Report to **Month 7**, 31st October 2024.

Councillors asked the following questions:

- **102/1459 (Civic & Democratic/Elections)** – There were no costs for this year, where did the costs of the May by-elections go?
 - The Responsible Finance Officer will investigate this and get back to Cllr Ford.
- **105/4000 (Central Services/Salaries)** – Are they all set up for the settlement to be paid alongside Decembers payroll?
 - The Responsible Finance Officer confirmed that this had already been paid in the November Payroll.
- **105/4056 (Central Services/Legal & Professional Fees)** – The budget is quite low compared to the actual, it states tender costs for the Ground Maintenance Contract. These costs were known so why was the budget set so low compared to the actual?

The Chair explained that perhaps it was known last year, and the Town Clerk assumed it would cost less and budgeted a smaller amount. The budget is done through the best of people's abilities and knowledge at the time of budget creation. It is difficult to act once the budget has been agreed if costs are changed or higher than anticipated.

Officer to ask Town Clerk how the legal fees were estimated in the budget.

- **301/4190 (Open Spaces/ Parks & Garden Contract)** – predicted to be £150,000 over budget for the year.
- **308/1014 (Whitelands Sports Village/Inc-Miscellaneous)** – Previous year was £1,800 & this year is £93,000, I wonder where the previous years income was going to?
 - The Chair explained that it was probably coded incorrectly by the interim Responsible Finance Officer.

Officer to investigate 308/1014 income for 2022-2023 period.

65/2425 Bank Balances

RESOLVED that as per Financial Regulation 2.2 the committee **REVIEWED** and **NOTED** the attached report detailing bank balances at the 19th November 2024 and **NOTED** that Cllr Russell has signed the monthly bank reconciliation for the year to 31st October 2024.

66/2425 Aged Creditors

Councillors enquired whether the Responsible Finance Officer had contacted Cherwell District Council regarding the invoice owing for the Sheep Street bollards and if CDC had chased the outstanding debt. The Responsible Finance Officer informed the group that they had contacted CDC with no response given, officer has phoned and emailed, and we have not been chased for payment. Councillors advised the Responsible Finance Officer to get in touch with the section 106 officer at Cherwell District Council.

Councillors questioned whether payments had been made by Forte Entertainment to recover the duplicate payment made in error in 2023 for £10,800. The Responsible Finance Officer explained that a payment plan was agreed; the supplier paid the initial £5,000 on the 16th May 2024 and they asked for a further payment plan consisting of 4 payment. On the payment plan that was negotiated, they still owe £1,450 for September and £1,450 for October. Councillors asked if credit safe is used

when looking for suppliers, to find the financial health of our supplier. The Responsible Finance Officer couldn't comment on previous years but stated that they were not aware of this being done while they have been in the role.

RESOLVED that in addition to Financial Regulations 5.2, the committee **NOTED** and **APPROVED** the aged creditors as of the 13th November 2024.

67/2425 Aged Debtors

RESOLVED that in addition to Financial Regulations 5.2, the committee **NOTED** and **APPROVED** the aged debtors as of the 13th November 2024.

RESOLVED that the committee also **APPROVED** proposal i for Oxford RTC, and to explain to Oxford RTC that the pay as you go rate is not the same as the Service Level Agreement.

68/2425 Bad Debts Report

RESOLVED that the committee **APPROVED** the bad debt for Talent iD and Bicester Rugby Club and refer the agenda item to Full Council for approval under a confidential cover.

Going forward all bad debt, grant aid will go into the confidential section.

69/2425 Budget Report

RESOLVED that the committee **DEFERRED** the agenda item to the following meeting held on 7th January 2024.

Cllr Ford emailed all questions over to the Responsible Finance Officer as not all the questions could be answered without being investigated.

The Responsible Finance Officer asked if changes suggested during the Finance meeting to the budget could be made for Approval at the Full Council meeting.

Cllr Sibley advised that we could make changes and agree them in the next Finance Meeting for presentation to the Full Council as it won't be finalised until then with our main objective being to agree a budget in the Meeting on the 7th January 2024. It is all about building on assumptions as we still have a financial quarter to go through.

70/2425 Earmarked Reserves

RESOLVED that the committee **DEFERRED** the agenda item to the following meeting held on 7th January 2024

Councillors asked that the Responsible Finance Officer ask for advice from the internal auditor before a decision is made by the council. The officer is then to update the committee via email.

71/2425 Grant Aid Applications

RESOLVED that the committee **APPROVED** the following grant aid with the following amendments:

- Cygnets Preschool - £1,000
- Ability - £1,000
- Bicester Baby Bank - £1,000 instead of £1,200 as per the Grant Aid policy.

20:14 Helen Pool left the meeting. 20:16 Helen Pool returned to the meeting.

72/2425 Outdoor Team Rest Room and Drying Area

RESOLVED that the committee **APPROVED** Supplier A and **APPROVED** Service and Infrastructure costs. Funding to be taken from **EMR 901/9020 BTC Premises** with £913.995.

73/2425 Obsolete Items on the Asset Register

RESOLVED that the committee **NOTED** the removal of the obsolete items over £1000 from the assets register and to recommend it to council for approval.

74/2425 Utilities Report

RESOLVED that the Committee **NOTED** the information given in this report.

75/2425 Notice of Conclusion of Audit & External Auditor's Report

RESOLVED that the Committee **NOTED** the Notice of Conclusion of Audit and the report of the External Auditor as well as future action required and **RECOMMENDED** the report got to Full Council for approval.

76/2425 Independence & Competence of the Internal Auditor

RESOLVED that the Committee **REVIEWED** the independence and competence of the Council's internal auditor in accordance with the good practice guidance offered by the Joint Panel on the Accountability and Governance (JPAG) Practitioners' Guidance published by NALC and to make recommendation to Full Council confirming the current appointment of the internal auditor.

77/2425 Forward Plan

RESOLVED that the Committee **NOTED** the forward plan.

78/2425 Date of the Next Meeting

7th January 2024 at 19:00hrs

Meeting Closed: 20:36hrs