

LEIGHTON-LINSLADE TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE
MONDAY, 23 JANUARY 2023 AT 7.30 PM

Present: Councillors S Jones (Chair)
 A Dodwell
 C Palmer
 R Berry
 T Morris
 G Perham
 M Freeman
 R Goodchild
 S Owen

Also in attendance: M Saccoccio, Town Clerk
 I Haynes, Head of Grounds and Environmental
 Services
 S Sandiford, Deputy Town Clerk
 M Jahn, Committee Officer

Members of the public: 1
Members of the press 0

424/PF APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Scott and Kharawala.

425/PF DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Freeman declared a personal interest in agenda item Community Volunteer Award Nominations.

426/PF QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC (3 minutes per person; maximum 15 minutes)

There were no questions from the public

427/PF MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

(a) The Committee received the minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee meeting held on 14 November 2022.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee meetings held on 14 November 2022 be approved as a correct record and were signed accordingly.

(b) Updates from the previous meeting:

Minute referece 414/PF: an update was given regarding the Cost of Living Grants with £6,000 remaining from the £10,000 allocated. Previous applicants had been contacted to enquire if any further grants were needed to continue with their 'warm spaces' facilities.

Minute reference 419/PF (Christmas Car Parking): a question was raised to enquire if any feedback had been given on how successful this initiative had been. It was not possible to measure success as the ticket machines had been disabled to allow free parking.

428/PF PAGES PARK FINE TURF LAWNS

The Committee received a report to consider a recommendation from the Grounds & Environmental Services Committee to approve funding for levelling the fine turf lawns at Pages Park on behalf of the Croquet Club, as well as repair and improvement of the footpath to the pavilion building.

A question was raised regarding the suggested use of glyphosate to spray the entire existing grass area however, it was confirmed a similar product could be requested as stated on the quote.

RESOLVED:

(a) To note the report.

(b) To approve expenditure of up to £28,000 from Future Projects earmarked reserve 925/9033 (Open Space Improvements) for levelling of the fine turf lawns at Pages Park as well as repairs and improvements to the footpath leading to the Pages Park Pavilion.

429/PF PAYMENTS

The Committee received schedules of payments for November and December which had previously been approved for payment by the Town Clerk and countersigned by two signatories. There were no anomalies or matters of concern to draw to the attention of the Committee.

The schedule for November dated 9 December 2022 included BACS payments amounting to £120,091.06 (page numbers 3154-3167) including petty cash payments for £73.81 for the White House and salaries of £96,916.77.

The schedule for December 2022 dated 11 January 2022 included BACS payments amounting to £108,272.05 (page numbers 3168-3180) including £498.66 for the White House and salaries of £146,066.78.

A cash book report for November and December 2022, including details of all direct debit payments, was also received.

RESOLVED to receive the schedules of payments for invoices received in November 2022 paid in December 2022 and invoices received in December 2022 and paid in January 2023.

430/PF NINE MONTH BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

The Committee received the nine-month budget monitoring report for the period April – December 2022. No queries were raised by the Committee.

RESOLVED to note the report.

431/PF COMMITTEE OBJECTIVES AND WORKPLAN

The Committee received the Committee Workplan and Objectives for 2022-2023.

RESOLVED to note the Committee Work Plan and objectives for 2022-2023.

432/PF SUB-COMMITTEES AND TASK & FINISH GROUPS

The Committee received the following draft minutes and considered any recommendations contained therein.

(a) Community Safety Sub Committee meeting held on 16 January 2023.

Minute reference 135/CS (Draft Community Safety Budget 2023-24): a question was raised regarding whether the predicted increase in police numbers would affect expenditure under Operation Dodford for additional policing activity. It was expected the level of service provided should remain the same if not improve.

RESOLVED to receive the draft minutes of the Community Safety Sub Committee meeting held on 16 January 2023.

(b) South Side Working Party meeting held 9 January 2023.

Minute reference 47/SSWP (Central Bedfordshire Council Update): members of the Committee shared frustration on the lack of input from Central Bedfordshire Council on their future plans, needs assessment and next steps on Land South of the High Street.

A question was raised as to whether the public should be informed and involved in the discussions regarding the plans for this land. Members felt that more engagement and information was needed from Central Bedfordshire Council before involving the public in the process. It was felt that a timeline was needed and if information was not received within the agreed timeframe, further action could be considered. The Town Clerk

agreed to write to Central Bedfordshire Council again to emphasise the frustration felt due to the lack of involvement.

RESOLVED to receive the draft minutes of the South Side working party held on 9 January 2023.

433/PF GENERAL GRANT GUIDELINES

The Committee received a report to consider temporary amendments to the General Grant guidelines as suggested by the Grants & Awards Sub-Committee on 7 November 2022. This would allow general grant funding for operational/revenue costs, rather than a specific project, for financial year 2023-24. It was hoped that this would allow groups to recover following the impact of the pandemic and help them avoid having to pass on increased costs to their members given the cost of living pressures. The relaxation of normal requirements could be reconsidered for 2024-25.

RESOLVED:

- (a) To note the report.**
- (b) To endorse temporary amendments to General Grant criteria for financial year 2023-2024 in acknowledgement of the impact of the Covid pandemic and cost of Living/energy crisis on charity, voluntary and not-for profit groups.**

434/PF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

The Committee received a report regarding the declaration of interests and granting of dispensations, which followed on from the endorsement of a revised Code of Conduct at the previous meeting.

A question was asked regarding the mechanism by which a councillor could challenge a decision to refuse a dispensation; it was agreed to investigate this further.

RESOLVED:

- (a) To note the report.**
- (b) To endorse the proposed amended wording regarding Interests and Dispensations to be included on formal meeting agendas.**
- (c) To endorse that no changes be made to the existing Dispensations Procedure other than removal of the final seven words.**
- (d) To approve the proposed revised Councillor Dispensation Request form.**

435/PF CALENDAR OF MEETINGS

The Committee received a draft Calendar of Meetings for the municipal year 2023-2024 for consideration.

A question was raised regarding a possible change of day for the Market Sub Committee meeting in November 2023, this would enable all members to attend more easily.

A suggestion was made regarding the start time of meetings changing from 7.30pm to 7.00pm. It was felt this could be considered by the new Council administration when they reviewed the proposed calendar of meetings at the Annual Council Meeting in May.

RECOMMENDED to Council to approve the proposed Calendar of Meetings for the municipal year 2023-2024.

436/PF RISK REGISTER AND ACTION PLAN 2023-2024

The Committee received a report regarding the Town Council Risk Register and Action Plan for 2023-2024 and considered the recommendations contained therein. Five areas had been identified for focus this year, some of which were already underway. This represented fewer areas of risk and action than in previous years, partially due to pandemic-related risks now having been removed and partially due to the completion of previous action items.

RECOMMENDED to Council approval of the Risk Register and Action Plan for 2023-2024 to be signed by the Town Mayor and the Responsible Financial Officer.

437/PF ASSET REGISTER

The Committee received the asset register for consideration, including land and buildings, infrastructure assets, community assets and equipment.

RESOLVED to note the report.

438/PF FACILITIES IMPROVEMENTS

The Committee received a report to approve expenditure for the purposes of delivering recommended improvement works as identified within the disability access audit report.

The proposed improvements would include hearing loops within pavilion buildings and council premises and tactile signage to be provided initially in the Astral Park facility with the aim for the council to have at least one asset that was fully accessible to the community.

A question was asked about demand for these improvements. Members acknowledged the Council's responsibilities under the Equalities Act and in light of its 2021 equalities statement, with views expressed that accessibility to public buildings was important for all residents. The funding for proposed works was in an earmarked reserve for that purpose as agreed by Council in

June 2021.

On being put to a vote, proposals were agreed (8 for and 1 abstention).

RESOLVED to approve expenditure up to a maximum of £20,000 from the Facilities Improvements earmarked reserve (£82,646 available) for the purposes of delivering recommended improvement works as identified within the disability access audit report.

439/PF INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT (FIRST INTERIM)

The Committee received the first interim internal audit report for 2022-2023 and noted that no issues had been identified.

RESOLVED to note the report.

440/PF DRAFT BUDGET 2023-2024

The Committee received a report in respects of the proposed budget for the Financial Year 2023-24. The expenditure and income predictions had been considered by all standing committees and sub committees with budgetary responsibility and recommended by all for approval. A number of budget headlines were set out in the covering report including reference to increased costs and a higher than usual RPI of 12.6%.

On being proposed and seconded, it was agreed to recommend approval of the draft budget to Council (7 for, 2 abstentions).

RESOLVED to note the report and the budgetary recommendations made by the other committees with budgetary responsibilities.

RECOMMENDED to Council approval of the proposed revenue budget for 2023-24 (total expenditure £2,874,353 less anticipated income £271,365).

A second part to the report set out the tax base increase and demonstrated a shortfall in meeting proposed expenditure. Five options had been created to demonstrate how the predicted annual budget requirement for 2023-2024 could be met. These included use of the precept support fund which had been established for this purpose, use of general reserves, a reduction in the budget line for future capital projects, an increase in precept demand or a combination of those options.

It was agreed this would be discussed within political groups with the decision made by Council on 30 January 2023.

441/PF DATA PROTECTION AUDIT REPORTS

The Committee received the Data Protection Audit reports from an external audit undertaken in November 2022 and considered the recommendations therein. Any issues highlighted would be addressed over the next twelve months and taken forward by officers of the Town Council.

RESOLVED to note the report.

442/PF EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED that, under the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, the public be excluded on the grounds of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted which involves the likely disclosure of exempt information. The public and press to withdraw from the meeting during consideration of detailed discussion regarding:

443/PF COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER AWARD NOMINATIONS 2023 (information attached)

The Committee received and considered the recommendations from Grants & Awards Sub-Committee in November 2022.

RECOMMENDED to Council to approve the nominations of Anne Guess and Ian Summerfield for the Community Volunteer Awards 2023.

The meeting closed at 8.59 pm.

I HEREBY CONFIRM THAT THE FOREGOING IS A CORRECT AND ACCURATE RECORD OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 23 JANUARY 2023.

Chair

27 FEBRUARY 2023