

LEIGHTON-LINSLADE TOWN COUNCIL

POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

22 NOVEMBER 2021 AT 1930 HOURS

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

Also in attendance: M Saccoccio (Town Clerk)
S Sandiford (Deputy Town Clerk)
V Cannon (Head of Cultural & Economic Services)
Cllr V Harvey
K Karimzandi (Citizens Advice Leighton-Linslade)
S Cubrilo (IntoPlaces)

Members of the public: 1

291/PF APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors D Scott and M Freeman.

292/PF DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Palmer declared a personal interest as a member of the Friends of Leighton-Linslade in Bloom (agenda item 7, Payments).

No pecuniary interests were declared and no dispensations were requested.

293/PF QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from the public.

294/PF MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Committee received the minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee Meeting held on 20 September 2021.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee held on 20 September 2021 be approved as a correct record and were signed accordingly.

295/PF CITIZENS ADVICE LEIGHTON-LINSLADE

The Committee received an update from Kash Karimzandi, Chief Officer of CALL regarding services provided and the financial contribution made by the Town Council. Due to the pandemic, advice was currently being offered by telephone or email five days per week, by around 50 volunteers supported by 6 members of staff. Volunteers were mainly general advisors but there were also some specialist advisors. Some longstanding volunteers had left during the pandemic period but new volunteers had been recruited. There had also been changes to the Board of Trustees which was now up to strength at 12 members.

The Committee was advised that CALL continued to offer advice and help on a range of subjects but that financial matters such as claiming benefits and seeking help with debts remained a key area where help was needed. A case study example was given to demonstrate how a resident could be helped and the difference this could make to their quality of life.

Looking ahead, funding streams remained uncertain and the Council was thanked for its ongoing financial support which was helping to ensure services could be maintained.

There was concern about how people would cope with the rising cost of living, the increase in heating costs, the loss of the temporary Universal Credit uplift and the ongoing impact of the pandemic.

Committee members thanked Ms Karimzandi for her presentation and expressed thanks and support for all the work done by the Citizens Advice team.

RESOLVED to note the report and to formally express a vote of thanks to everyone at Citizens Advice Leighton-Linslade for their ongoing support to residents.

K Karimzandi left the meeting.

296/PF TOWN CENTRE REPORT

Further to a town centre workshop held on 8 November 2021, the Committee received a report and a presentation from consultant S Cubrilo of IntoPlaces.

The Committee heard that with a vacancy rate of 6% compared to a national average of 9%, the town centre was performing better than in many places and this represented a strong foundation on which to improve further. The town centre had many strengths including its attractive environment, range of independent shops, vibrant street market, growing café culture and proximity to local schools, which helped draw people in. There were also challenges, including the continuing impact of the Covid pandemic with reduced footfall and accelerated changes in shopping habits, a lack of leisure

activities and a lack of a family offer to encourage people to stay into the evening. It was also felt that pedestrian links and wayfinding could be improved, as well as trying to attract a younger clientele to the street market.

Looking forward, a wider partnership approach was encouraged, with all key stakeholders working together towards a shared vision and action plan for the town centre. A partnership model might have a number of sub-groups looking at different topics in greater depth.

A number of questions were asked and answered. When asked for a view on the success or otherwise of town centre pedestrianisation, Ms Cubrilo advised that in their experience, a hybrid and flexible model worked best.

The Committee agreed that the first essential step was to share the information with Central Bedfordshire Council and to seek clarification on their vision and how they saw the place making agenda developing.

RESOLVED:

- (i) to note the report.**
- (ii) To share the information with Central Bedfordshire Council and to seek direction on how the local authority proposed to progress the place making agenda.**

Ms Cubrilo was thanked for her presentation and for attending the meeting.

297/PF LAND SOUTH WORKING PARTY

The Committee considered draft Terms of Reference for the South Side Working Party. It was suggested that the “purpose” be widened to include liaison with the local authority on plans to develop the whole of the site, not just looking at community facilities. It was also proposed that the membership be extended to fit better with the political representation of the Council.

RESOLVED to approve the proposed Terms of Reference and proposed meeting timetable as set out, with some widening of the “purpose” statement and to add Councillors A Dodwell and F Kharawala to the group membership.

298/PF MINUTES OF SUB-COMMITTEES

(a) The Committee received the draft minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee meeting held on 11 October 2021 and considered a number of recommendations contained therein.

RESOLVED to receive the draft minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee meeting held on 11 October 2021.

RESOLVED to endorse the changes to the Social Media Procedure.

RECOMMENDED to Council to endorse the Flexible Working Policy.

(b) The Committee received the draft minutes of the Community Safety Sub-Committee held on 18 October 2021.

RESOLVED to receive the draft minutes of the Community Safety Sub-Committee held on 18 October 2021.

(c) The Committee received the draft minutes of the Health Services Task and Finish Group held on 18 October 2021 and 10 November 2021.

RESOLVED to receive the draft minutes of the Health Services Task and Finish Group held on 18 October and 10 November 2021.

(d) The Committee received the draft minutes of the Grants & Awards Sub Committee held on 1 November 2021 and considered a number of recommendations contained therein.

RESOLVED to receive the draft minutes of the Grants & Awards Sub Committee held on 1 November 2021.**RESOLVED:**

- (i) To endorse that the Leighton-Linslade Music Centre Service Level Agreement be renewed for a further four years (2022-23 until 2025-26) on the same terms.
- (ii) That funding for 2022-23 start at the current level of £8,921 with an annual increase based on the September RPI.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That a one-off third round of General Grant applications take place for the financial year 2021-22, to be considered at an additional meeting of the Grants & Awards Sub-Committee on Monday, 21 February 2022.
- (ii) That the General Grants guidelines be relaxed only for this specific round of applications to allow for more general uses, in order to support local charity and voluntary organisations following the Covid-19 pandemic. All other terms and conditions to continue to apply and all applications to demonstrate clear need and community benefit.

RESOLVED to update the Community Volunteer Award procedure to make it clear that the award is for individuals only.**299/PF SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER 2021 PAYMENTS**

The Committee received schedules of payments for September and October 2021 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 September 2021 dated 8 October 2021 included BACS payments amounting to £206,656.10 (page numbers 2945-2955), including petty cash payments to TACTIC of £44.72. A cash book report for September 2021, including details of all direct debit payments, was also received.

The schedule for October 2021 dated 13 October 2021 included BACS payments amounting to £122,281.09 (page numbers 2958-2972) including petty cash payments to the White House of £128.77. The monthly salaries listing for October 2021 amounting to £102,092.33 gross was received. A cash book report for October 2021, including details of all direct debit payments, was also received.

RESOLVED to receive the schedules of payments for September 2021 and October 2021 which had been approved for payment by the Town Clerk and two councillor signatories.

300/PF SIX MONTH BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

The Committee received the six-month budget monitoring report for the period April – September 2021. It was reported that the budgeted 2021-22 annual income for pavilion hire and street markets, which had been set at a lower rate this year due to the pandemic, had already been exceeded.

RESOLVED to note the report.

301/PF INTERIM INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT 2021-2022

The Committee received an interim internal audit report for 2021-2022 and noted that no issues had been identified. The Committee expressed thanks for an excellent report.

RESOLVED to note the report.

302/PF COMMITTEE OBJECTIVES AND WORK PLAN

The Committee received the Committee work plan and objectives for 2021-2022.

RESOLVED to note the Committee work plan for 2021-22.

303/PF EXPENDITURE FROM EARMARKED RESERVES ON I.T.

The Committee received a request for the proposed expenditure on computer equipment and considered the recommendations therein.

RESOLVED to approve expenditure of £600 for 6 monitors and up to £2,500 for 3 laptop computers from the Facilities Improvements earmarked reserve 9038/920.

304/PF CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL UPDATES**(a) Town centre car parking**

The Committee received a copy of email correspondence from Central Bedfordshire Council in respect of the costs for sponsoring free town centre car parking. Discussion took place and this was agreed to be a worthwhile initiative to support the town centre in the crucial pre-Christmas trading period. It was hoped that it would be possible for the local authority to action this despite the short timescales. A motion proposed by Councillor Goodchild was agreed by Committee.

RESOLVED that the Town Clerk is requested:

- (1) to convey our extreme disappointment that, due to the tardiness of Central Bedfordshire Council's response to our request for a trial period of free parking lodged in July this year, the initiative is not now a viable proposition to allow Leighton-Linslade residents to benefit before Christmas, and**
- (2) to finalise financial arrangements to enable free parking in Duncombe Drive and Hockliffe Street car parks on 4th, 11th, 18th and 24th December for a fee not exceeding £5,000.**

(b) High Street temporary pedestrianisation

The Committee received a copy of correspondence dated 10 November 2021 from Central Bedfordshire Councillor I Dalgarno in respect of the temporary pedestrianisation of the High Street and the next steps being taken, including the current benchmarking survey of town centre users and engagement with a number of groups and companies.

RESOLVED to note the correspondence.**305/PF EARMARKED RESERVES**

The Committee received a report outlining current earmarked reserves. There were no questions.

RESOLVED to note the report.**306/PF FIRST DRAFT BUDGET 2022-2023- & FIVE-YEAR FINANCIAL PLAN**

The Committee received a first draft budget for financial year 2022-23 and a report outlining key headlines, including an increase in the number of dwellings by 152 and the creation of a new budget line for climate change. It was noted that the current budget indicated a shortfall of £129,229 but the budget was yet to be reviewed by the standing committees. The draft budget included £200,000 for future projects which represented 9% of the total, with the remainder of the budget for operating costs for core services.

The Committee also received a current version of the five year financial plan, which set out the Council's currently planned projects as well as the potential impact of continually increasing costs on the general reserve over time. There were options for consideration to protect the general reserve such as borrowing for larger capital projects.

RESOLVED:

- (i) To note the reports.**
- (ii) That each standing committee with budgetary responsibility be presented with its own draft budget for consideration and thereafter, for the draft budget to be returned to this committee on 24th January 2022 for its further consideration.**

The meeting closed at 2159 hours.

I HEREBY CONFIRM THAT THE FOREGOING IS A TRUE AND ACCURATE RECORD OF THE MEETING HELD ON 22 NOVEMBER 2021.

CHAIR

24 JANUARY 2022