

Finance & Governance Committee

Present: Cllrs Chapman, Collins, Goodman, Cooper-Marsh (Chair), and Hitchin

Absent: Cllrs Banks, Kumar, Maslen and Pitt.

In attendance: Town Clerk, Responsible Finance Officer

Minutes of the meeting of the **Finance & Governance committee** held on **Tuesday 16th July 2024** at **7.30pm** in the Priory Centre, Priory Lane, St Neots, PE19 2BH.

Public Participation

There was one member of the public present.

ACTIONS

026 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllrs Banks, Kumar, Maslen and Pitt.

Admin

027 Declarations of Interest

None declared.

028 Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the 18th June 2024 as a true and accurate record.

029 St Neots Library Grant

Members heard from St Neots Library on an application for funding towards the summer reading challenge, which last year had 648 children take part during the summer holidays. The library arranges events through the holiday which are affordable for local families. There is no budget, and the Council has historically supported the initiative through grant funding.

Members queried the use of funds. The applicant explained that the County Council funds the core activities and medals, and the Town Council funding would be used for additional resources, craft and enhancements.

RESOLVED to grant £500 to St Neots Library for the summer reading challenge.

030 Payments

Members received and noted payments for May 2024.

031 Public Works Loan

Members received and noted the outstanding balance of a public works loan for the building of the Eatons Community centre along with the most recent settlement figure.

The RFO explained that the reference to £7,500 per year repayment is actually £15,000 year paid off the principle. There is £26,000 in the budget for repayment of the loan principle and the annual interest. It was explained that the end of repayment

year is due to be 2039 and if the Council continue to repay over that period the total interest would be £70,515. If the loan was to be repaid based on 1st July 2024 figures (when last valuation was taken) then the interest would be approximately £10,000. It was explained that the current CCLA interest level was higher than the fixed interest at present.

A Member queried whether the interest rate from the CCLA was taxed. The RFO stated that none of the interest paid had been taxed and that the Council is exempt from corporation and income tax. The RFO would investigate further and report back to the committee.

A Member commented that the Council should look to earmark reserves for the repayment of the loan to ensure that it kept appropriate reserves to cover repayment in the event that the Council were in financial difficulties. The RFO commented that the Council precept for the annual repayment of the loan and the question would be as to whether the Council wished to continue to do this.

A Member stated that they felt it was important that the amount due on the loan be recognised on the balance sheet and highlighted in the Council's reserves if the Council has the funds to discharge it but chooses not to. They felt the funds should not be thought of as an excess of general reserve limits which are then freely available for allocation to other expenditure. The RFO will seek further advice on the matter.

032 St Neots Skatepark

Members received and noted an update on the St Neots Skatepark refurbishment project for which the Council has awarded grant funding. The Council awarded £50,210 to the project based on costs presented to it at the time an application was made. Following the awarding of funding the applicant was able to agree lower project costs as a result of the contractor bringing in new machinery which allows the job to be done more efficiently. As a result, the Council's contribution to the project would be lower than resolved at £35,343. This would secure the same outcome and standard as originally quoted.

033 Forget-Me-Not Memorial Garden

Members received and considered a recommendation from the Finance and Governance Committee on providing Council funded plaques for the Forget-Me-Not Memorial Garden.

RESOLVED to RECOMMENDED that that the Council continue to offer free memorial plaques for the Forget-Met-Not Memorial Garden in the future financial years and that the Council consider and budget for the provision of plaques as part of the 2025-26 budget setting process.

034 Financial Regulations

Members received and considered model Financial Regulations which had been amended to reflect St Neots specific practices. The RFO presented the policy and highlighted areas where there had been changes, however overall, the policy remained in line with the existing financial procedures for the Town Council. There had been updates under petty cash to reflect that the Priory Centre required more

than the Council offices, and the Engagement and Participation Youth Worker had been added as a credit card holder with a limit of £1,500.

A Member queried section 5.14 of the regulations which set out the number of Councillors who can approve expenditure over £2,000, noting delays in orders can be made if approvals are not sent quickly enough. It was suggested that the number of councillors appointed to approve payments be increased to any two of four named members to cover periods when members may not be available.

A Member raised a concern around the need to seek approval for orders of £2,000 when a committee or the Council had already approved the expenditure and there was a resolution supporting this. The purpose of the system was for managers to seek approval of expenditure over £2,000 from officer delegated revenue budgets.

It was proposed and seconded that the Council adopt the updated financial regulations subject to increasing the number of councillors who can approve expenditure over £2,000 to four by adding the Deputy Chairperson of the Finance and Governance Committee and excluding the need to officers to seek such approvals when expenditure has already been approved by a committee or the Council.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the Council adopt the updated Financial Regulations as presented subject to the following amendments;

- 1) Section 5.14 be amended to include the Deputy Chairperson of the Finance and Governance Committee as a Councillor who can approve expenditure over £2,000, resulting in approval needed from two of any four named councillors.
- 2) Section 5.14 be amended to exclude the need for approval of expenditure of £2,000 by nominated councillors when the expenditure has been approved by a committee or the Council and a minuted resolution is in place.

Members discussed the need to test that restoring data from back ups was working. The Chairperson of the Committee and Cllr Goodman agreed to send details to the RFO who would check with the Council's IT provider.

Members noted the need for a Councillor who was not on the Bank Mandate to check bank reconciliations on a quarterly basis. It was agreed that Councillor Hitchin would act in this capacity.

035 Tree Maintenance Policy

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the Council adopt the proposed Tree Maintenance Policy.

036 Freedom of Information Policy

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the Council adopt the Freedom of Information Policy subject to amending section 5.1 to read "including, but not limited to:"

037 Burial Regulations

Members received and noted draft Burial Regulations which were deferred by the Operations and Amenities Committee to allow further time for consideration. Due to the length and detail of the regulations they were highlighted to the Finance and Governance Committee ahead of further consideration in September 2024 to allow time for Members to review. Members were asked to read the regulations before the next committee meeting and put any questions through to the Senior Administrator.

038 Approval of Payments

Members noted Cllr Goodman had been appointed as a third member who is able to approve payments/purchase orders over £2,000 in line with the Council's Financial Regulations.

Members noted that a recommendation had been put to the Full Council to increase the number of Councillors who can approve payments to four by including the Vice Chairperson of the Finance and Governance Committee.

039 Date of Next Meeting

Members noted that the date of the next scheduled Finance and Governance Committee meeting would be 17th September 2024 at 7:15pm.

COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON