

Finance & Governance Committee

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

Absent: Cllr Banks and Kumar

In attendance: Town Clerk, Responsible Finance Officer, Project Delivery Manager

Minutes of the meeting of the **Finance & Governance committee** held on **Tuesday 17th September** at **7.30pm** in the Eaton's Centre, The Maltings, St Neots, PE19 8ES.

Public Participation

There was one member of the public present.

ACTIONS

040 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllrs Banks and Kumar.

Admin

041 Declarations of Interest

None declared.

042 Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the 16th July 2024 as a true and accurate record.

043 Payments

Members received and noted payments for June 2024.

A Member queried which budget gazebo weights would come from. The Clerk confirmed this would be allocated to the 'Events Equipment' budget.

044 Income and Expenditure

i) Members received and considered income and expenditure for the year to date. The RFO explained that the report format had changed, and the Balance Sheet now broke down reserves, including showing the level of General Reserves carried over at the end of the last financial year and the current years surplus, which is 6 months precept minus 3 months expenditure.

ii) Members received and considered a summary report on budget overspends in quarter one. Councillors thanked officers for the report, which was transparent.

Members discussed high expenditure on card fees, and it was explained that this was due to more card transactions than budgeted for at the Priory Centre.

Members noted the Council would not be using the £2,000 glass house rental budget, but that officers would be requesting this money is allocated to annual planting, the costs for which had increased significantly due to now using an external provider.

045 **Bank Cash and Investment Reconciliations**

Members received and noted bank cash and investment reconciliations, which had been reviewed and signed by Cllr Hitchin in her appointed role as a Councillor to check bank reconciliations.

A Member raised a query about why Priory Centre takings were listed separately as they all go into one account. It was explained that income goes to a Priory Centre separate account, which the RFO can transfer between.

A Member raised the merit of moving a further £1,000,000 of funds to the CCLA account. It was agreed by the Clerk that this would be done prior to the next Committee meeting.

046 **Reserves**

- i) Members received and noted the list of current earmarked reserves.
- ii) Members considered reallocation or consolidation of Earmarked Reserves.

RESOLVED to rename the ‘Depot Ride on Mowers’ Earmarked Reserve to ‘Ride on Mowers and Vehicles’ (EMR12)

RESOLVED to rename the ‘Depot Equipment and Vehicle’ Earmarked Reserve to ‘Depot Equipment’ (EMR11)

The Operations and Amenities Committee will be asked to consider depot/operations equipment and costs associated to requirements that are anticipated in the coming years.

Cllr Maslen left the meeting at 20:10.

RESOLVED to pay the Loves Farm Earmarked Reserve of £117 to the Loves Farm Community Association.

Cllr Maslen returned to the meeting at 20:14.

RESOLVED to rename ‘Splash Park Loan’ Earmarked Reserve to ‘Splash Park Project’ Earmarked Reserve to reduce CIL allocation.

047 **Young Persons Counselling Service SLA**

Members noted that an agreed SLA with the Young Persons Counselling Service to provide counselling services to young people in St Neots could not progress and the funds paid by the Council were to be returned to it.

The Council had been asked whether it would consider directly engaging the Counsellor who delivered the sessions as an alternative, therefore allowing the youth counselling to continue.

Members expressed concerns over the additional administration and personnel work this would place on Council officers, as the Council would be engaging a sole

contractor rather than an organisation. While Councillors were mindful of these concerns, they agreed there was important value in the sessions and continuing them as quickly as possible would mean those young people engaging with the service could continue to do so.

RESOLVED to allocate the £11,000 Youth Counselling to directly engaging a Youth Counsellor to continue delivering youth counselling sessions out of Longsands.

That the Town Clerk investigate further how the service may be extended or shared across different locations in St Neots.

048 By-Election Costs

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND the Council approve expenditure of £5,353.96 in earmarked election reserves towards the £13,353.96 cost of a St Neots Town Council by-election held on 2 May 2024. The remainder will be paid from the current year's election expenses budget.

049 Christmas Lights Expenditure

Members received and considered a report from the Events and Communications Officer on overspend in the capital Christmas light budget to enhance the 2024 display. The overspend would be offset against an underspend in the revenue budget covering the annual contract cost. The cost of the works will enable 10 more lampposts to host Christmas light motifs as part of extending the display along Cambridge Street.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND the Council approve over expenditure of the Christmas Lights Capital budget (240 4508) by £1,503.10 to allow enabling works for an additional 10 streetlight Christmas decorations. That the overspend is offset against underspend in the Christmas Lights lease budget (240 4507).

050 Museum Roof Repair

Members received and considered a recommendation from the Operations and Amenities Committee that the Council agree to undertake works they are required to repair the museum roof. The roof has been subject to numerous minor 'patch work' repairs over the years, but its condition has deteriorated to the point that sympathetic works are needed across the various sections of the building to ensure it is watertight. Members noted that a number of urgent works had been completed under the maintenance budget for the building.

Members noted that it was essential to repair the leaks to ensure that the museum could continue to operate safely, that its collections are cared for and that it can progress with new digital boards.

Once the roof is properly fixed other areas of the building can be further investigated in line with the heritage building assessment the Council carried out.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the Council release £9,990.00 in funding from the earmarked reserve for Community Buildings to complete the replacement of the rear

felted flat roof (Job 4), including removal and disposal of 3nos redundant A/C plants and relocation of 8nos working A/C plants with replacement of the pipework.

051 Church Wall, St Mary's St Neots

Members received and considered a recommendation from the Operations and Amenities Committee that the Council approve expenditure of up to £2,000 for professional services to support enabling works needed to repair the perimeter wall at St Mary's Churchyard, St Neots. The Town Council is responsible for the maintenance of the Churchyard, which includes paths and walls. The wall is adjacent to a highway and as such disrepair poses a health and safety issue.

This enabling work will allow the Project Delivery Manager to come back to the committee with options for progressing.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the Council approve expenditure of up to £2,000.00 from General Reserves to appoint a professional consultant (Structural Engineer) to renew the recommendations of previous Structural Survey and provide the design drawings for the wall rebuild/repair.

052 Street Furniture

Members received and considered a recommendation from the Operations and Amenities Committee that the Council approve the disposal of two 'parklets' that were previously located on the Market Square and which have reached the end of their economic use.

It was noted that they have no value and need to be removed from asset register.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND the Council approve the disposal of two parklets previously located on the Market Square that have reached the end of their economic life and that they be removed from the asset register.

053 Service Level Agreements

Members received and considered a report on Service Level Agreements and whether the Council might be minded considering entering agreements with organisations to which it has historically awarded annual grant funding. It was commented that a lot of applications coming for yearly large grants were for running costs, which the Council grant scheme does not fund. If the Council is funding any form of running costs it should have control and agreement over how funds are used and delivered.

The Town Clerk explained that any potential SLA would need to be considered as part of the overall budget setting, as it would impact the Council's precept. As such the Council would not be able to agree any Service Level Agreement (SLA) until a budget was resolved and any discussion with organisations should be clear about this.

Members felt it was granting recipients identified to provide an initial basis of an SLA in request to the Council, clearly stating the service that would be provided, why it was needed, the benefit to St Neots and the cost associated to it. The Council would need to know what is being provided and the specific costs against that provision.

Members noted that the type of regular annual grants that would be impacted by the new grant aid policy were from two distinct areas, either service/support of individuals or events. While Members felt that an SLA would work in the case of personal support organisations, it would be appropriate for cultural events.

Members felt that it should be clearly stated that the Council would not expect an application/SLA for something which already receives funding from elsewhere.

It was agreed more work was needed to build a framework around external event funding and how this might be managed, including criteria and structure.

RESOLVED that the Town Clerk and RFO engage with those personal support/service organisations the Council has granted annual funding to and who will be excluded from regular grant applications under the new grant aid scheme. That the organisations are invited to put forward proposals for a Service Level Agreement to be considered by the Council as part of the 2025/26 budget recommendations

RESOLVED to establish a Working Group to bring forward recommendations on how external event grant funding applications might be managed.

Membership of Working Group to comprise of: Pitt, Goodman, Chapman, Dundas-Todorov, Cooper-Marsh.

054 **Date of Next Meeting**

Members noted that the date of the next scheduled Finance and Governance Committee meeting would be 22nd October 2024 at 7:15pm.

COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON