

Finance & Governance Committee

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

Absent: Cllrs Banks, Kumar, Maslen

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

Minutes of the meeting of the **Finance & Governance committee** held on **Tuesday 18th March 2025** at **7.15pm** in the Eaton's Centre, The Maltings, St Neots, PE19 8ES.

Public Participation

There were no members of the public present.

ACTIONS

128 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllrs Banks, Kumar and Maslen.

Admin

129 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

130 Minutes

It was agreed to defer approval of the minutes of the meeting of the Finance & Governance Committee held on 18th February 2025 until the Clerk had further checked that the list of those Members in attendance and those absent. The Minutes will be brought back to the Committee meeting to be held on 22nd April 2025 for approval.

131 Payments

Members received and noted payments for January 2025.

132 Income and Expenditure

Members received and considered income and expenditure for the year to date along with reports highlighting overspends in budgets. The Responsible Financial Officer outlined the Council's financial position. Members discussed the Council's General Reserve position, which while historically high and above the 6 month required reserve level was anticipated to be lower at the end of the current financial year due to recent Council activity and expenditure.

Tracking expenditure against the earmarked reserve was discussed, it was acknowledged that this can be difficult within the Council processes and reporting. It was suggested that a General Reserve level is reported every six months following the receipt of precept, with a record of any resolved expenditure against the reserve level at that time.

133 Reserves

Members received and noted Council Reserves and earmarked reserves as of 31st January 2025. It was suggested that a separate meeting might be required to consider the Council's approach to its current level of general reserves.

A Member raised a query over an earmarked reserve for The Cage (Lockup). The Town Clerk was asked to bring forward a report to the Operations and Amenities Committee from the Operations Manager on using the funds for required repair work.

134 Transition of Operational Vehicles to Plug-in Hybrid

Members received and considered a recommendation from the Operations and Amenities Committee that additional funding of up to £3,000 is allocated from the Council's General Reserve for the agreed purchase of plug-in hybrid alternative operational vehicles.

The Chairperson of the Operations and Amenities Committee introduced the item, explaining that second-hand versions of the required electric plug-in hybrid vans were not capable of towing, which was essential for the operations team. As such new generation vehicles capable of towing have been sourced, requiring additional funding.

Members discussed towing capability of the vehicles and the ability to operate in electric when towing. It was noted that the vehicles to be replaced tow smaller items and that at times petrol would still need to be used to 'run down' the tank.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the Council approve additional funds of up to £3,000.00 (incl. contingency) to replace 2010 Ford Ranger and 2013 Nissan Navara with two brand new PHEV Ford Transit Custom.

RESOLVED that the Committee resolve to approve purchase of additional EV chargers from the 2025/26 revenue budget based on identified need following a period of operating the vehicles.

135 Operations Depot Entrance Doors

Members received and considered a recommendation from the Operations and Amenities Committee that the Council upgrade front entrance doors at the operations depot to steel as part of a required replacement. The Clerk advised Members that the level of funds due from the insurance company for replacement of doors had not yet been confirmed, but this would be on a like for like basis.

Members debated the benefit of steel doors versus the higher expense. A Member commented that a combination of a less expensive steel door and improvements to the roller shutter door security may be a better value approach, particularly as improving door security will make the roller shutter more vulnerable. Other Members commented that improvements to the roller shutter security had already been undertaken and given its size it would be difficult and expensive to increase security further.

Members queried the difference between the two steel doors quoted and why the most expensive door was preferred by the Operations Manager. A Member commented that it would be useful to have an independent view on the differences between the doors and whether the more expensive quote offered more security.

The Project Delivery Manager commented that the more expensive door was of thicker steel.

Members debated whether to ask the Operations and Amenities Committee to further consider the matter but agreed that the decision on a door and preferred quote should be put to the Town Council with the Operations Manager present to advise. It was also asked that the company providing the cheaper quote be asked to confirm whether the door meets the same standards and specifications as the more expensive door.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND;

- That the Council consider installing steel doors to improve security of the depot building, that more information is provided to the Council on the specifications and differences between the two quoted steel doors for decision by the Full Council. That the Operations Manager present reasonings for a preferred quote.
- That additional costs required for these doors above the level of a 'like-for-like' UPVC option are allocated from the Council's General Reserve. That the purchase and installation is subject to signing a new lease for the building.

136 Neighbourhood Development Plan Review

Members received and considered a recommendation from the Neighbourhood Development Plan Working Group on approving funding for the appointment of an appropriate planning professional to undertake a phase 1 approach to reviewing and renewing the St Neots Neighbourhood Development Plan.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that up to £3,950 in funding is allocated to appoint a preferred professional consultant to undertake stage 1 Neighbourhood Plan review work, which will include research, site visits, workshops, reporting and recommendations to set the scope, brief and focus of the review and renewed plan, including project timescales.

137 St Mary's, St Neots Church Wall

Members received and considered a recommendation from the Operations and Amenities Committee on costs for required repairs to St Mary's Church Wall. Members were reminded that the Town Council had a duty for the maintenance of the Church yard, its paths and walls under legislation. The wall around St Mary's St Neots is on a public highway and is in very bad condition, this presents a health and safety risk meaning the Council needs to take some action.

The Project Delivery Manager explained that the cost presented in the report for the repair of the wall were a worst-case scenario including contingencies and were prior to negotiations with a preferred contractor. Due to the location of the wall the scope of the work has had to allow for risks around disturbing burials which adds costs which might not be incurred.



Officers advised that grant funding was being investigated, and some pre-applications had been made. However, due to the repair nature of the project it is unlikely external grant funding can be secured.

Members discussed the specifics of the wall, with the Project Manager outlining recommendations from the structural engineers report that had previously been represented to the Operations and Amenities Committee. It was noted that the work needed to be approached in the same way other conservation work is approached.

Members agreed that as the repair was a duty of the Council it needed to progress with addressing the matter.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the Council resolve to approve funding up to £250,000.00 (subject to the external grants funding availability) from General Reserve to rebuild the perimeter wall at St Mary’s Parish Church in St Neots.

Due to the level of the proposed budget the Responsible Financial Officer advised that if the Council approve the recommendation there should be no further commitment of general reserves until the end of financial year position was clear.

138 Unspent Budgeted Expenditure

Members considered a reported recommending the Council approve earmarking balances which are unspent on 31 March 2025 in specific budget codes.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the committee recommend unspent budget at the 31st March 2025 in the following budget codes is transferred to earmarked reserves for future use;

Cost Centre	Budget Code	Budget Heading
105	4146	Equipment and Furniture (office)
105	4365	Carbon Neutral Budget
201	4116	War Memorials
210	4100	Play Repair and Maintenance
210	4107	Tree Maintenance
230	4118	Gatelodge Expenses
230	4127	Ex-Servicemen’s Club
230	4119	The Cage / Lock up
301	4105	Bus Shelters
301	4123	Highways Improvements

139 Date of Next Meeting

Members noted that the date of the next scheduled Finance and Governance Committee meeting would be 22nd April 2025 at 7:15pm.

COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON